THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

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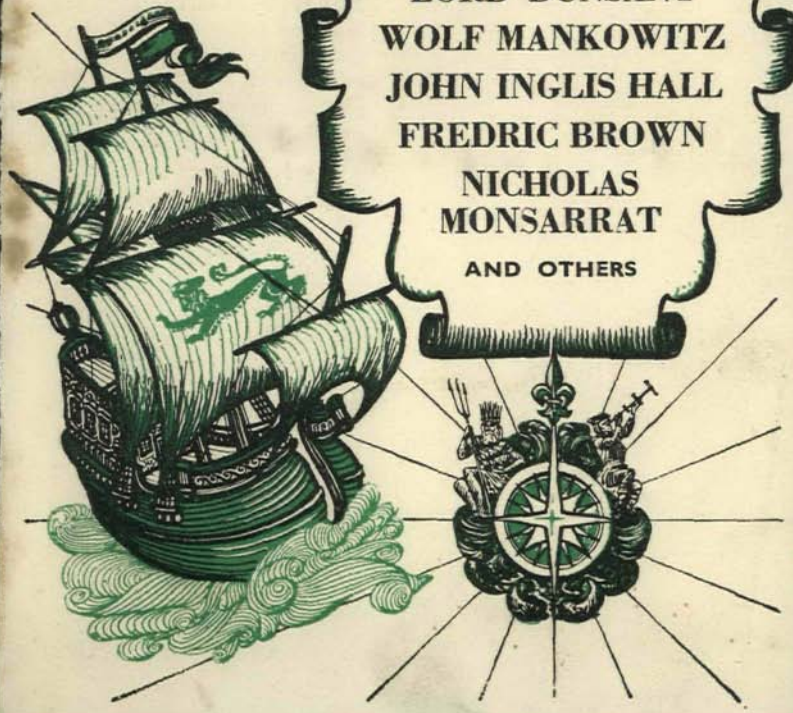

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ARGOSY

Contents for February, 1954

Vol. XV **No. 2**

		Page
To Victoria and her Snowdrops	**John Pudney**	4
From "Sixpenny Songs," by courtesy of the Author and John Lane, The Bodley Head; illustration by Sonia Robinson		
Resistance Heroine	**John Inglis Hall**	5
Map	**Lionel Wiggam**	14
Touch of Irish	**Hugh Michael Hogan**	15
Make Yourself at Home		20
Contraband	**F. E. Ellwood**	21
The Play's the Thing		26
"Curtain Up!" by permission of the Hand and Flower Press; "Artiste's Temperament," by courtesy of William Heinemann		
Mocking-Bird	**Lord Dunsany**	29
The Colonel's Lady	**W. Somerset Maugham**	35
From "The Complete Short Stories of W. Somerset Maugham," by permission of the Author and William Heinemann		
Masha is the Devil	**Wolf Mankowitz**	51
A Bench in the Park		56
The excerpt from "Miss Brill," by courtesy of the Society of Authors and J. Middleton Murry, O.B.E.; "Turkish Medley," by permission of Macmillan and Company; "Primrose Path," by courtesy of William Heinemann; "Nightfall," by permission of the Hand and Flower Press		
I'll Cut Your Throat Again, Kathleen	**Fredric Brown**	59
The excerpt from "When That I Was," by courtesy of Faber and Faber		
Sacred Drum of Itampo	**E. C. Anstey**	75
Happy Pair		86
"Love Unspoken," by permission of the Hogarth Press; "Judicial Separation," by courtesy of the Cambridge University Press		
Valentine for Betsy	**Harriet Frank, Jr.**	88
Dusk Below Helvellyn	**Graham Sutton**	109
From "Fell Days," by permission of Museum Press		
The Story of Esther Costello (Last Part)	**Nicholas Monsarrat**	114
Published in book form by Cassell and Company		
Argosy Prize Crossword No. 9		144

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To Victoria and her Snowdrops

SOLEMN as nuns and sprightly as Monday laundresses
Victoria's snowdrops offer a green-white smile.
Never did I see a more distinguished gathering,
Victoria, show more guile.

So beguiling are your green-white nuns and laundresses,
Gathered together, Victoria, with such skill,
That I'm as silly with spring in the midst of London
As a tufted goat on a green hill.

JOHN PUDNEY

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RESISTANCE HEROINE

"She is a cat of character," said Madame Garnier.

by JOHN INGLIS HALL

HER name was Velours and her feet were smooth and softly padded, armed with curved claws. If you pressed the middle of a pad when she honoured you by sitting on your lap, they emerged with exquisite, barbed neatness, and she generally bit your finger, but it was worth it for a sight of the perfect mechanism of her foot. Her colour was a pure, creamy beige, with chocolate feet, chocolate ears and a chocolate, kinked tail. She had also pale, unblinking, crossed blue eyes . . .

I first met her in the second year after the war, when I visited Madame Garnier's house at Ventes-sur-Yare, in Normandy, to fish. Madame Garnier was sitting on the terrace at the back of her house, facing the river. Velours, whose name I did not then know, lay in Madame Garnier's ample lap, stretched out in an attitude of sybaritic abandon, taking the spring sun. The day was mild and the air scented. Birds were singing, and beside the river, fifteen yards away across the lawn, the weeping willows trailed their long streamers in the clear, flowing water.

"She is a cat of character, Monsieur," said Madame Garnier. "A cat of distinguished breeding, of noble blood. Her mother was a Khmer, and her father a Siamese. She is called Velours. You like cats, Monsieur?"

I nodded my head.

"Very much," I said. "I keep no other pets at home. But I never owned a Siamese."

"Ah, Monsieur, they are most original! I never think of myself as Mademoiselle Velours's owner. Rather, she owns me. I imagine her as one who keeps pets to amuse herself—me and the green parrot. We are not very funny, evidently, because she has never been known to laugh at us, but she recognizes, I think, that we do our best, and treats us kindly."

Madame Garnier laughed fondly and caressed Velours with her big, smooth hands, burrowing into the soft fur of the creature's belly. Velours stretched out her legs, behind and before, until her body was taut as a drawn bow, and purred luxuriously. Madame Garnier was a charming woman, large and comfortable,

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with big, jewelled rings on her fingers, though she dressed simply. She might have been sixty years old. I had been sent to her as a paying guest for the mayfly season by a friend who had known her well during the days of the German occupation.

"A dauntless character," he had said. "She saved more lives than I can tell you, including my own. A cool head, if ever I knew one. You will like her."

It was my first afternoon at Madame Garnier's house, which was called Le Manoir. I had arrived by the morning boat to Dieppe, coming out in the ramshackle Rouen bus, crammed with farmers and their plump, pink wives, returning from the Saturday market. When I had told the driver where I wanted to be set down, he had said: "Ah, at Madame Garnier's? A formidable woman. She has the Legion of Honour, a Croix de Guerre and the Resistance Medal, you know? She helped many of your compatriots. You are going there to fish?"

He glanced up at my fishing-rods on the rack, among the parcels.

"Yes," I said. "Is the fishing good?"

The driver raised a hand from the shaking, vibrating wheel, keeping his foot pressed well down on the throttle nevertheless. I felt he would have liked to raise both hands, but just restrained himself.

"*Prima!*" he said. "You will be pleased, Monsieur. And there is the house, the white one on the left, set back a little from the road, by the poplar trees. The river is on the other side of the house." He braked hard and the bus screamed and trembled to a halt by the open white gate, with a pebbled courtyard beyond.

Madame Garnier was waiting for me outside, with an aged, gnarled gardener beside her, to carry my bags to the house.

"*Vous voilà*, Monsieur," she said as I got down and my bags and fishing-rods were passed out to me by the driver. "How nice of Monsieur March to have sent you. With good news of his dear wife and children, I trust? *Allez*, Paul," she said to the gardener, "take Monsieur's affairs to the house. Mind the fishing-rods. *Merci*, Gabriel," she called to the driver, "for bringing Monsieur safely to Le Manoir. I see your old machine still works? One day it will fall to pieces, and then what will the good people of Ventes do on market-days?"

There was a feeling of tremendous zest, of great gaiety, and greater competence about Madame Garnier, which was impressive. The bus driver laughed before he answered her, but there was deference in his voice.

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"*Oui*, Madame, it goes still. It coughs a little in the mornings, perhaps, but it goes still. Good-bye, Madame! Good-bye, Monsieur! *Au plaisir!*" He stretched out a hand to her, which she shook, then he pulled the door to and the aged bus ground on.

We turned to the house, white and elegant, with window-boxes in front of every window of its two storeys, full of spring flowers.

"Here is Le Manoir, Monsieur King," she said. "Freddy March, the excellent man, knows it well—particularly under the mansard roof, where we used to hide them sometimes, even when the Germans were in the village, and I had German officers billeted in the house."

She pointed up to the innocent, grey slate roof, sloping to the eaves.

It was after I had had a bath, unpacked in my room with its big, carved, Norman box bed and yellow coverlet, and changed into my fishing clothes, that I went down to the terrace at the back of the house to set up my rod. There, Madame Garnier and I talked, and I had met, in the manner described, the beautiful, the highly-bred, the redoubtable Velours . . .

After a while, Madame Garnier got up from her deck-chair and gently rolled Velours off her lap. The cat stretched herself for a moment, legs straight out in front of her, quarters in the air, kneading the mossy flags of the terrace with her front paws. Then she stood up straight, and "yow-yowing" plaintively, after the manner of Siamese, she trotted away through the tall grass, towards the river.

"Ah, you are going fishing then, my little Velours?" cried Madame Garnier. "Imagine, Monsieur, Velours fishes for trout, all by herself. It is strange, isn't it?"

She spoke without affectation, but I was sceptical and laughed, treating the whole matter as a joke. People so often endow their pets with intelligence and capacities far beyond the perception of their visitors, or even the possibilities of the animal kingdom as a whole.

"You do not believe me, Monsieur King?" she cried. "But it doesn't matter. You will. Come now; I shall point out to you the extent of my fishing."

Velours had disappeared, and we walked over to the wooden bridge across the narrow river on the far side of the lush, overgrown lawn. Leaning over the wooden rails, we surveyed the rich, green fields of Normandy, stretching mile on mile towards the wooded hill on the far side of the valley. It was indescribably

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peaceful. The water ran musically beneath us and the air was murmurous with insects. On the surface of the water, the grey and white and yellow mayflies floated and fluttered, and there were satisfactory splashes and swirls as the trout swept up to the surface, feeding on them. We were silent for a few minutes.

"Think that it was like this during those springs when the enemy was here," Madame Garnier said thoughtfully. "That was the hardest. But we bore it . . ."

Then she showed me her fishing—one mile downstream from the house, on both banks of the river.

"And now, I shall go in and prepare your supper," she said. "You will be hungry after your journey, no doubt, but you will want to fish first. My husband and my sons were like that. You could not keep them away from the river when they came home. That is why I like to have fishermen in the house. I like to think that, somehow, my men can watch them and enjoy it all, as they used to in the days before the war. I shall not say 'Good luck.' In France, we use instead a rude word when we want to wish people luck—a military word . . ."

She smiled and left me. I knew that she had lost her whole family in the war, except her daughter—her husband in the Resistance in the last months before the invasion, and her two sons in the battles before France was overrun. I climbed over the gate at the end of the bridge, wading luxuriously into the tall, rustling grass, and began to prepare my cast and tie a mayfly to suit the colour of the hatch on the water.

Madame Garnier called to me from the terrace of the house, where she stood for a moment, watching me. "And don't forget to look out for Velours. She will be fishing too."

I waved to her and laughed, but surrendered to her fancy. "All right," I cried. "I'll watch for your fishing cat! Count on me!"

Three hours later, I had reached the end of Madame Garnier's fishing. The sun was down behind the hills and the landscape was taking on the soft, limpid, luminous colours of the evening. I had caught eleven trout, and following Madame Garnier's instructions, I had threaded strings through their gills and tied them, as I caught them, to branches of trees and roots by the river, in order to collect them in a bucket afterwards and put them in a wire cage which she kept in the river in front of the house so that she could use the fish for eating as they were needed.

Leaning against a wooden fence, I lit a cigarette and considered thankfully the present luxury of my life, and how it would flow peacefully though quickly for the next ten days,

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until I had to go home. I started back towards the house. About halfway there, I stopped, perceiving a sudden movement beside a bush by the river, where I knew I had tied a fish. It was Velours.

She leapt up in full view of me from among the waving grass, and in her mouth, her teeth fixed in its back, flapping wildly, was a trout. Seeing me, she trotted quickly away, her burden held high. I laughed, believing that I understood the manner of Velours's fishing.

"Scoundrel!" I cried after her. "Villainess! Thief! Robber!"

But I was not really serious. I admired her initiative and cunning. Besides, there were still ten fish, which were enough for anyone. The strange thing was that when I returned fifteen minutes later with my bucket, I collected not ten fish as I had expected, but eleven!

Over supper in the dining-room, with a replete, somnolent Velours curled up on my knee, revelling in the warmth of the fire on the open hearth beside us, Madame Garnier mocked me.

"*Voilà*, Monsieur the Sceptic," she said. "You did not believe that the cat fishes! *Eh bien*, now you know that she fishes! She stays by the bank until a fish moves up near to her, feeding, then she plucks up courage and dives in. You know, the Siamese are odd beasts, not like true cats at all, but she is the only one I have ever known who fished."

"And to think that I called her a thief and a rogue," I said contritely.

"Yes. She is also a Heroine of the Resistance, Monsieur King," said Madame Garnier. "And it happened because of her fishing. Let us move the supper table and draw up our chairs to the fire, and I will tell you about it."

A few minutes later, while the heroine herself slept on my knees, Madame Garnier told me her story.

. . . It was in 1942 (she began) at our worst time, perhaps, at Ventes-sur-Yare. It was the moment of our deepest despair. We were all tired and despondent. Germany still seemed too strong. The Allies had suffered many reverses. The landings in Africa had not yet taken place. We had had a little time to recover from the loss of Gilles and André, our sons, but no more. Many Allied aeroplanes were being brought down over Normandy, and we, of course, were helping the airmen to escape, when this was possible.

The village was quite loyal, but tense. Many people were

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for us, a few were doubtful—they were the most dangerous—and a very few, perhaps two or three, the weak and the faint-hearted, who always exist, after all, helped the enemy.

We had our escape network in fairly good order, moving our clients about between several houses round the village, including Doctor Morin's, the presbytery, and this house. It was dangerous work at times, and the Manoir was rarely used except in an emergency, because I had four German officers billeted here.

The Germans we had were, on the whole, decent men, intelligent and grown-up—*évolués*, as we say. They knew that we were the enemy, and after they had tried unsuccessfully to win us over as traitors, accepted that we were loyal Frenchmen and women, and respected us for it. We managed to live in a state of civilized neutrality which both sides knew inwardly was war. They were engaged in building the system of ramps for launching the flying bombs, up in the Forest of Arques across the valley.

Major Schliemann, who was in charge of the district, was one of those who lived with us. He was a good fisherman and loved the beauty of Normandy. It even made him a little more tolerable to my husband. He also loved the little lady now sleeping on your lap—Velours, whom he called Fraülein Samti.

At that time, we already knew that Mademoiselle Velours was a fisherwoman—she began it, you see, when she was about a year old. But Major Schliemann was a practical man and, like you at first, Monsieur King, a sceptic. Also, as he was out most of the days except Sundays, somehow, he never saw her at work. So the fishing cat became, for him, a heavy joke, to be brought out at mealtimes when conversation flagged, or when other German officers visited him.

I can still hear his voice in this room, laughing at us with his partly false, partly genuine *bonhomie*, and saying in his thick, heavy French: "Ach, Madame Garnier and her cat that fishes! It is droll, droll! But tell me, how is it that only the imaginative, the brilliant French ever see this phenomenon, and not the slow, plodding Germans, eh?"

After that, he would take up Velours in his big hairy hands, hold her close to his face, stare into her pale blue eyes and say: "*So, Fraülein Samti, du sagst nichts!* You will not show your Onkel Schliemann your talent. Even though he is a fisher too!"

Then one day, Monsieur King, we were almost caught. A British plane came over in the late afternoon and was shot down near the crest of the hill which you can see from your bedroom window, on the far side of the valley. Two of the crew escaped by parachute and we marked where they fell, about a mile from the house on this side of the road, in our territory.

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There was nobody at home except ourselves. All our " guests" were out and the village was deserted. My husband and my daughter went out at once with their fishing-rods as cover, and eventually found the men. One was wounded, but not seriously, and they had to be hidden. It was no use trying to get them back to the house at once—or to any house. They had to be left out until the search died down. To find and dispose of them took a quarter of an hour.

Fortunately, the apple orchards hide the house from the village, and people can move easily on the dead ground, if they know it well, without being seen from anywhere. Only a chance observer on the hill can see right down into the valley, and this time we were lucky. Nobody saw them or us.

Our hiding-place was a simple one: it had to be. The Germans could always be relied upon to search all the difficult places. In the fields over there, there is a small mound with a hidden declivity in it, overgrown with blackberry. We had made a hide-out there, leading into an old drain, where the river once ran, and in it, with care, two or three men could remain unseen for days. We used it several times.

By the time Major Schliemann came back to the house with his search-party, my husband and my daughter were fishing nearby—it was mayfly time, just like now. He had a dozen men with him, and called us all to this room and asked if we could give him any information about the two airmen who had escaped from the falling aircraft. According to his habit on official occasions, he was courteous but stern.

" I have to warn you, Monsieur and Mesdames," he said, " that this is a grave matter for all of you if the men are found concealed on your property. You understand? "

" I regret that we know nothing, Herr Major," said my husband. " It seemed to me that the men fell further down the valley, nearer to Arques. My daughter and I were fishing at the time the incident occurred, and saw it."

The Major clicked his heels and bowed stiffly to us. " Good, then." He turned to his men. " Search the house from floor to roof, then the stables, then the gardens," he ordered. " You," he added, turning to us, " will please remain in this room."

The search was over in twenty minutes, then after warning us strictly about our movements by day and by night for the next few days, he led his men out into the fields to search the orchards and the woods, right to the hills.

They found nothing.

For a time, the armed neutrality between us was very oppres-

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sive. We were watched in everything we did, so we did nothing except fish. Nevertheless, we contrived to leave food at prearranged places, so that our clients could fetch it at night. Doctor Morin managed to visit them and treated the one who was injured. Slowly, the atmosphere between us and our "guests" eased, and the hue and cry died down. We started rumours in the village that two men had been seen crossing the road to Dieppe in the next valley.

At last, we considered it safe, or relatively safe, to move them. We decided to stage them rapidly through the house early one afternoon when no one was in, and let Doctor Morin examine them thoroughly before starting them off to Rouen and the main escape routes to Spain. We got them safely to the room on the third floor and were waiting for Doctor Morin to arrive, when we heard a car drive in at the gate. It was Major Schliemann, returning for an afternoon's fishing . . .

Quickly, my husband and I ran downstairs, leaving my daughter to get the two men into the mansard where there were two big water-tanks, one dry, in which two men could sit for a time, wholly out of sight.

We met the Major in the hall. I suppose we were not sufficiently calm, for he looked at us piercingly.

"So, Herr Major," said my husband, rather lamely, "you have returned . . ."

The Major nodded, never taking his eyes from us.

"Yes," he said. "Why not? I decided to have an afternoon's fishing." He continued to watch us, narrowly.

Then, suddenly, we all saw a handkerchief lying near the wall under one of the chairs. It was stained with blood.

"*Tiens!*" said the Major. "What is this?" and went over to pick it up.

I watched my husband fumbling in his pocket as the Major bent down to pick up the handkerchief, and when he took his hand out, I saw that he had cut it with his fishing scissors and it was bleeding.

"It is my handkerchief, Herr Major," he said. "I cut my finger while I was fishing, and my wife was just doing it up in the bathroom when you returned."

The Major handed the handkerchief back to him without looking at it. Then he asked: "And why did you not continue? After all, I am living here, and can return when I wish?"

He paused for a moment, looking from one of us to the other, then he said in a more friendly tone, as though he were reconsidering his attitude: "Look, Monsieur Garnier. You must not think me unnecessarily suspicious. Bear in mind the events of

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the past week. I am not a man who wants to create scenes, as you know, and I may be wrong, but would it not be reasonable for me to ask you both, now, to accompany me on a tour of inspection of the house? A pure formality, you understand."

There was a note of irony in his voice which was not entirely pleasant, but by now my husband had recovered his composure. He played for a little more time for our daughter upstairs.

"As you wish, Herr Major," he said. "May I ask my wife to tie up my hand before we start?"

"By all means."

I tied the handkerchief carefully round his hand, concealing the English name-tab that it bore, in the palm.

Then we started slowly up the stairs.

"So," said the Major quite pleasantly, standing aside to let me pass, "doubtless it will take only a few minutes. . ."

I walked slightly ahead of the two men, listening to the loud beat of my heart and praying, vaguely, for the end of the world. It was when we reached the window halfway up the first flight of stairs, with its view down into the garden and across the river, that I saw suddenly, on the far bank, a small, crouched, cream-coloured shape, with chocolate ears and a gently twitching chocolate tail, gazing intently into the flowing water. It was Velours! I stopped and pointed with my right forefinger.

"Sst! Herr Major!" I said in a stage whisper, turning my head towards him. "Look! At last you see the fishing cat—at work!"

I watched him turn to the window, and his face slowly relaxed into a smile as he leaned out, placing his arms on the window-ledge.

"*Herrgott!* You are right, Madame," he whispered. "I never would have believed it. Never!"

We all stayed stock-still and watched in silence while I prayed that Velours would not be disturbed. She sat motionless. We could see her very clearly in the bright sunlight, and it was obvious that she was close to making her dive.

I could see her muzzle twitching as she gave vent to the slavering, trembling hunting-cry of cats in the moment before they spring. Then she gathered her quarters together; you could see the muscles tense throughout her small body, for a second she swayed from side to side, then suddenly, there was a splash, and she was gone! Two seconds later, her head emerged from the water, and in her mouth, struggling and flapping, was a trout. She had brought it off!

"Hurrah for Fraülein Samti!" I cried, taking the Major familiarly by the arm.

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He turned to us, laughing, genuinely delighted. "My apologies for having doubted you, Madame," he said gallantly. "Should we not perhaps go first into the garden for a moment and congratulate our lucky fisherwoman?"

We went down the stairs together and out of the french windows onto the lawn, talking all the while about the fishing cat. Near the river, we found Mademoiselle Velours, bedraggled but pleased and purring, rolling herself dry on the grass, her trout still alive beside her.

It was thus, Monsieur, that the close inspection of the house which the Major had intended never took place—we did not visit the mansard—and the afternoon ended with a friendly tea in the garden, certainly the friendliest we ever had with the enemy, followed by an evening's fishing.

Two days later, we managed to get our clients safely away, but it had been touch and go . . .

Madame Garnier was silent for a moment, looking quietly into the dying embers of the fire, then she got up and lifted the sleeping cat from my arms.

"So that is the story of Mademoiselle Velours, heroine of the Resistance," she said, waking her gently. "And now, Mademoiselle, a little outing for you in the garden, I think, and then bed."

★ ★ ★

MAP

The shallow hills are marked in shades of coral.
The fields are silver-grey, a colour of rain.
This is the land we mean to take tomorrow.
It is a level, uncomplex terrain.
The parallel, darker lines are roads, the curliest
Are little streams; the whole is scaled for distance.
We shall launch out at daybreak at the earliest.
We should encounter little or no resistance.

Of all impersonal things, a map is coldest.
It does not tell us of the gullies where
Mushrooms grow thickest, or which elm is oldest,
Or where with spice wild marjoram clots the air,
Or where a woman for simple loneliness wept,
Or a boy ran into the sun, or lovers slept.

LIONEL WIGGAM

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TOUCH OF IRISH

She told my father she wished she'd married his brother instead

by HUGH MICHAEL HOGAN

I DON'T remember, now, whether it was during my first or my second visit to Dublin, so that I can't be sure whether I would be ten years old, or twelve, at the time. But anyway, I know that I was still very young.

We had been to the evening service, my Uncle Conal and myself, at the little Redemptorist church in Macgillicuddy Street. It was a very wonderful sermon, that night; the preacher told us all about the rewards that goodness brought, and of the evil awaiting the wrongdoer; he had a splendid voice, too, and he spoke soothingly when he told of Paradise, and raved and stormed and beat his fists on the pulpit when he told about Hell. It seemed very calm, afterwards, with the sweet smell of incense, and the choir singing the most moving harmonies, and, at the end, the organ playing a slow, stately march as the procession left the altar.

We came out of the church into the warm light of evening. My Uncle Conal hesitated on the steps, and I knew that he would want to say a few words to some of the people he knew, and so I walked ahead as far as the street corner, from where I could see the river, to wait for him.

There was a glorious sky, with hardly a cloud in it, and what few there were lay just below the setting sun to filter a soft red glow over the buildings beyond the river, and throw their shadows out to ripple over the maundering Liffey. There was little wind, so that sounds carried clearly across from the other bank, and you could hear the laughter of the girls there, and the young men calling after them. A tug was tied up below the other wall; smoke climbed slowly from its tarnished funnel into the untroubled sky, and two of the crew leaned against the rail, smoking and quietly talking.

It was very peaceful, and in all that calm and quiet it was impossible to think of anything unpleasant. My soul was at peace, and, standing there with my back comfortable against the wall, I knew that I was very good. There could be no evil in me, and since I was resolved to remain good, it was clear that I

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could look forward to an untroubled life. It was a wonderful consolation to my spirit to know that I was good, and to have the Redemptorist's assurance of rewards temporal and spiritual, mundane and eternal.

"Hah, Michael me boy!" My Uncle Conal had come up behind me. "'Tis a grand boy y'are, to be sure," he boomed. "With the hump o' dacency on you, an' the slope o' grandeur. Hah! Like the gable end of a billygoat's rump."

My Uncle Conal was in the habit of saying such things to me, and because he kept his face straight I could never be sure whether he was making a joke or admonishing me.

"Haven't ye brought up the trap, then?" he roared. "Come on, now." He walked to the edge of the pavement, stuck two fingers into his mouth and gave a whistle that could be heard in County Kerry. The jarvey who had been minding the trap answered from further down the quay, and began to lead the pony up to us.

I was always nervous about getting into that cart with my Uncle Conal. He was a great, red-haired man, over six foot four, and whenever I looked at him I always thought of the side of a red brick house, with the sun shining on the windows. He weighed about twenty stone, and when he stood on the backstep of the trap you could hear the pony grunt; sometimes if he leaped on it in a hurry he would lift all four feet of the poor beast right off the ground. I think the little horse was as nervous of him as I was.

He gave the jarvey a tip, and the man stood aside to watch us embark. I liked to climb aboard after my Uncle, as I was certain that one day the horse would bolt before he was safely into the trap. But he helped me in first, and I waited in fear until he had trodden on the backstep; the horse gave his usual surprised cough, and turned his head in our direction. The fear left me once my Uncle had a firm hold of the trap; no pony could gallop with Conal aboard.

We went along by the river until we reached O'Connell's Bridge, and turned over that and made for the Stillorgan Road. We jogged along in silence, my Uncle standing four-square on the boards, nodding his great red head to his fellows, until we climbed the bank, and there we halted outside the public house. He put his hand into the pocket of his Norfolk jacket there, and produced a bag of bull's-eyes.

"See if you can get your gob round that lot while I wet me whistle."

He went into the public house, and from where I sat I could

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hear his great voice booming for a quart of bitter. My Uncle Conal had no use for pint glasses.

It was very quiet on the road, by this time. The city was behind us, and the sun just a deep red stain among the trees. There was a smell of limes from the woods beyond the road, and of stock from the garden of the public house. The pony was resting with his head hanging. The bull's-eyes had a wonderful flavour. Being secure in my goodness was a great thing, too. I felt very much at peace with my lot. Life was perfect.

After a few minutes my Uncle Conal came out and climbed into the trap. The horse came to life again, and he sent it trotting away up the road before lighting his pipe. He sat on the side-seat to do this, and I was filled with terror lest the trap over-balance, but he paid no heed to our plight, and went on ramming down the tobacco in his pipe with a finger as thick and horny as the blackthorn he carried.

When the pipe was chuffing out great clouds of dark smoke he turned to me and, beaming, he asked: "And what did ye think of the sermon, at all?"

I was very pleased that he should ask me this. It was one of the things he did, to ask what I thought of things. My father never asked my opinion of anything, and so it was always a pleasure to me when my Uncle spoke like this.

"It was fine," I told him. "That Redemptorist must be a very clever man." He smiled at me, and I felt encouraged to go on. "I mean, knowing all that about what happens to you when you die, and what it's like, and so on. It must take a lot of learning, all that."

"Ay. Ay."

"And it's wonderful, of course. I mean, about good and evil, and so on. Knowing that rewards come to you if only you'll be good. It's perfectly fair, isn't it? I mean—"

"Ay."

He puffed away at his pipe, and from time to time he would look at me and grin, or lower a great red mat of eyebrow in a sunlit wink. I sucked my bull's-eyes, and was at peace.

As we approached a row of houses he stood up, looping the reins over his wrists. We passed along the street. Suddenly, nodding towards one of the houses, he slapped his thigh: a quiver ran through the trap and the pony turned, cocking an ear.

"That's where O'Hoolihan lived, sure!"

"Was he a famous man, Uncle?"

My Uncle Conal threw back his great red head and laughed. "Famous, is it? Famous, did ye say? Ay, he was that." With

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gnarled forefinger he put several hundred pounds' pressure upon the contents of his pipe. "O'Hoolihan was a man of great charm. Stupendous charm, he had. Ay, and great talent, too, if the truth be known. He was a boy, was O'Hoolihan."

"What did he do?"

"Do? What didn't he do! I tell you he was the most charmin' man ever born of woman, was O'Hoolihan. He could charm a jig from a corpse, a subscription from a nun, or a kindness from the divil himself. He was a lovely feller. He could take the eyes out of your head and leave you shamed you hadn't given him the sockets, too. He was a darlin' man."

"Was he a collector, then?"

"Collector? That's exactly what he was, now, a collector. Hah! You've got it: a collector. He was the biggest damned thief since Ali Baba and a damn sight smarter. He'd have been here today but for a bit of rotten bad luck: he was gettin' out of a house he'd burgled when he fell down the stairs and broke his leg. A bit o' rank bad luck, sure: it could have happened to anybody."

"And then what happened?"

"What happened? Why, they sent him to the cooler, d'ye know! Six months, they gave him. They tell me he should ha' got six years, but by the time he'd finished talkin' to the judge the poor man was in tears. It near broke his ould heart, so it did.

"Ay, six months, he got. An' sure, he hadn't been inside the can hardly a minute but he'd everyone's sympathy. He was a dark little mountainy kind of a feller, and everyone loved him."

"And did they let him out?"

"They did not, then. Indeed they did not. But they were after tryin' to make things a bit easier for him, don't ye know, an' one day one of the warders, a good, kindly man, asked him if he would like to do a little job for him, outside the prison. Paintin', he said.

"'Is it paintin'?' says O'Hoolihan. 'Sure you'd go far to find a skilfuler man wid a brush than the person you're talkin' to. Why, now, an' it's meself has been a foreman painter in me time. An' what could I be doin' for you, at all?'

"'Well,' says the warder, 'it's the matter of me little flat, like. I'd like to have it done up a bit. I'd be obliged to you if you could help.'

"Aye, and help he did, sure enough. The warder got the governor's permission, and off went me bold O'Hoolihan to paint the flat, takin' with him a few of his fellow prisoners to do the work because, d'ye see, himself was a foreman painter."

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"And was he really a foreman painter, Uncle?"

"Was he . . .? How the he—? No, Michael, he was not, then."

"And did he escape?"

"He did not. What would he want to escape for, an' him livin' off the fat of the land there, never havin' to lift a finger but to drink the tea that the good, kindly warder provided for him, or to smoke the cigarettes that the warder's pretty wife gave him? Now, what would he want to escape for?

"Escape? He did not. He made the job spin out as long as he could, and when he'd done it he went back to finish the rest of his sentence like the charmin' man he was. Sure, you don't think a man like that would do anythin' wrong, now, would you? He finished his time."

My Uncle Conal knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and urged the pony to a trot. It was becoming dark, and we were nearing the farm.

"And is he out of prison yet?"

My Uncle turned to me. "Ay, Michael, he's out, right enough. But sure, nobody knows where he's gone to. He marched out of the prison gates on the day of his release, and there waitin' at the end of the road was the warder's wife. D'ye see, he'd fair charmed the heart out of the poor woman while he was paintin' the flat, and so she was waitin' for him there, with her bags all packed, and her savin's in her purse, and tickets bought for the train that was to carry them away. Ay, and off they went, the two of them together, and neither of 'em has ever been heard of again from that day to this."

I don't believe I made any answer.

"Of course," said Conal, "it's the warder I'm sorry for."

"Yes."

"Ay. A quiet, dacent slob of a man he was. An' handsome, too: he'd a face on him so pockmarked it would hould a shower o' rain. A good-livin' man he was, though. Terribly kind, I believe."

"He must have been very angry."

"Ay. Oh, he was angry, right enough! He went home and found the note from his wife, tellin' him she'd gone off with O'Hoolihan, and he was so damned mad that he went out on the town. He wasn't a drinkin' man at all, but d'ye see, he was so mad he just had to do somethin' to let off steam. Well, he did, for sure. The drink took hould of him, and what did he do but go out and beat the bejasus out of a civic guard?—a Corkman he was, too, the same feller. They charged him with assault and sent him up for six months."

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We drove on through the gates and up to the farm, and as he lifted me down from the trap he rumpled my hair for me.

"Rewards for the good, did ye say? Punishment for the wicked? Ah, don't be talkin'!" He threw back his great red head and laughed. "'Tis a disorderly world we live in, to be sure."

Much later, when I got back home, I told my parents about O'Hoolihan and the warder. My father became very angry, and said his brother was a damn fool to fill young people's heads with such nonsense, but my mother only laughed. I think she was fond of my Uncle Conal. I remember once when she was having a barney with my father she told him that she wished she had married his brother instead.

★ ★ ★

MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME

If you were a visitor in any of these fictional households, you could hardly fail to notice certain peculiar features of your environment. Score one point for identifying the family with whom you are staying, one for the novel, play or poem in which it appears, and one for the author, making a possible total of twenty-four. The answers are on page 113.

1. *You would find this family living in rural retreat because the matriarch, at a tender age, had seen something nasty in the woodshed.*
2. *Here you would see two boys in sailor costume fighting with broadswords, and discover that everyone, including the pony, was a member of the theatrical profession.*
3. *In this household, you would be embarrassed at the husband's table-manners, as he flings the mutton away, complaining it is over-roasted.*
4. *In this bachelor establishment, you would find the cigars kept in the coal-scuttle and the tobacco in a Persian slipper.*
5. *In this nursery, you would be surprised to watch the nurse carry a bottle of medicine in her mouth for one of the children to take at bedtime.*
6. *Here you would learn that the prospect of returning to Moscow was the unattainable vision of three young girls.*
7. *In this house, you might be told that Havelock Ellis, next to "The Wind in the Willows," was the favourite reading of the son and heir to the Pastmaster title.*
8. *In this great hall, you would observe nine-and-twenty knights carving at the meal in gloves of steel and drinking red wine through the helmet barred.*

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CONTRABAND

She was devilish pretty, with one of those smiles that keep you guessing

by F. E. ELLWOOD

A TOUGH, wiry little man—independent and determined as the devil—was Jean-Paul Dufresne. Started with nothing. Of course, it was a bad time for all the islanders twenty years ago, the big loot of the old days all gone, and not much in the way of prospects for sons of pirates in a rule-and-regulation-ridden world. They felt born at the wrong time, you might say. Most of them scratching for a living, fishing, trading, growing whatever they could manage to grow on the two or three inches of soil on the top of Lys cliffs. But here and there you'd find a rebel. Jean-Paul was one of these.

He wanted his own boat, wanted it badly, and took to fishing the turbot shoals to make the necessary money. The islanders never exactly fell over themselves to volunteer as crew for the shoals—dangerous, with the currents and reefs and the rocks you can't see. But it was profitable, and in time Jean-Paul had raised enough to buy his own smack. The *Marguerite*, she was called, not new or very smart, but a handy little craft for what he had in mind. Which wasn't fishing at all, of course, but the smuggling trade.

He had his plans all ready and his contacts lined up. He would call in at a little French port and pick up all the wines and brandy the *Marguerite* could carry. That part was easy. Then he'd go round by night to a fishing village in Pembrokeshire called Wemswy, get rid of the stuff, and be away before dawn.

He decided on Wemswy because he had a useful contact there, a Welshman named Daffyd Owen who'd been in the business himself, and retired on the proceeds now that he was getting on a bit. Like most of these smugglers, Daffyd couldn't leave well alone, and he'd agreed to handle the distribution of the goods after Jean-Paul had got them as far as Wemswy. Jean-Paul would let him know in advance when the *Marguerite* was due, and he'd arrange for the stuff to be taken from Wemswy harbour by van to Haverfordwest, where he'd be waiting.

Of course, after a few trips when everything went well, Jean-

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Paul must have known he could have sold the stuff almost anywhere along the coast; but by this time there was another attraction in Wemswy—Daffyd Owen's good-looking young wife, a girl called Olwen. Of course it's all horribly immoral, but, you see, it was so *easy*, Daffyd being away in Haverfordwest whenever the *Marguerite* was around, and the Owens' cottage so handy, along the jetty, round the corner, up some stairs to the top of the harbour wall, and there you were.

And think of the circumstances! Jean-Paul always arriving around midnight, ready for a nice bit of warmth and welcome after a rough passage, or happy and thankful after a near brush with the excise people, or feeling pretty pleased with himself after a specially good bargain at one end of the trip and finding he'd got it all safely away at the other. I suppose it was only natural, if you come to think of it. Anyway, it all worked out very nicely, and, actually, he was quite fond of her. He used to tell Olwen she reminded him of Thérèse.

Thérèse was the girl at home in Lys who was going to marry Jean-Paul now that he was a man of parts with his own boat, and showing every promise of being a good deal better off than most. You'll say that sounds cynical, but she was devilish pretty, this Thérèse, with curves in all the right places, one of these secretive smiles that keep you guessing, and a far-off look in her eye. Whereas Jean-Paul wasn't exactly glamorous; although, of course, you can't ever tell with women.

Of course, anybody would tell you that the Wemswy affair ought to have stopped after he'd married Thérèse. But somehow the temptation must have been too much, habits die hard and, anyway, Lys hasn't ever been what you'd call moral. Anxious enough about other people's morals, but one code for you and one for me, especially between husbands and wives, and the great thing being never to be found out.

Well, time went on and all went well. It must have been a busy life; change, danger, excitement, the Wemswy affair running smooth and sweet, business progressing nicely—and then Thérèse announcing that she was about to present him with an heir. All went well, that is, until the night when the *Marguerite* was hit by a sudden squall in the narrow channel outside Lys harbour. She was driven onto one of those jagged rocks that line the channel: Jean-Paul and the crew were picked up all right, but the *Marguerite* was smashed to bits.

It was a blow to Jean-Paul. He'd built Thérèse a house, bought her presents, taken presents to the young woman at Wemswy, and now there was precious little left—you know the

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islanders, improvident, born gamblers, take any risk in the world to save the insurance money. It looked like the end of everything.

But before he went back to the turbot shoals to begin all over again, Jean-Paul thought it would do no harm to find out just how much a new boat was going to cost him. So he went down to the old jetty to see Georges.

Georges Duclos was the only boat-builder in Lys, and as it happened, he wasn't any particular friend of Jean-Paul's—some trouble between the two families that ought to have been buried years ago, but they have long memories for that sort of thing in Lys.

Moreover, Georges was mean; the loss of one little sou would have broken his heart. So imagine Jean-Paul's surprise when the tight-fisted Georges offered to build him a new boat right away—and special terms, at that.

"How much have you got?" said Georges.

Jean-Paul told him.

"That's all right, then," said Georges. "You can pay me the rest out of your profits. And no hurry, my dear Jean-Paul, no hurry at all."

Now *I* should have been suspicious. But not Jean-Paul. All he could think of was his boat, like a small boy who's been promised a clockwork train for Christmas and doesn't care where it's coming from. It was quite touching the way he was grateful to Georges. And Georges said, "Don't worry. Maybe you'll be doing a little favour for me one of these days."

And so in quite a short time the new boat was ready, a first-class job, sleek-looking, seaworthy, as unlike the *Marguerite* as débutante and dowager. Jean-Paul, excited as a schoolboy, fetched Thérèse down to the jetty to see it.

"There!" he said. "What did I tell you, isn't she beautiful? Now, Thérèse, you name her."

Thérèse looked at Jean-Paul, then at the boat, seemed to think carefully for a minute, then slowly smiled that far-off smile. "I name her the *Olwen*," she said.

At first Jean-Paul didn't know what to say. Here was certainly a tricky situation. His thoughts flew to Wemswy. Did she know or didn't she? Jean-Paul's head whirled round trying to weigh up the chances. Maybe one of his crew had been talking; maybe—But Welsh boats were in and out of the harbour two, three times a week, Welsh names were almost a fashion now, and in the fanciful state of his wife's mind at a time like this . . . Odd, though, all the same, he thought. Very odd.

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He smiled at Thérèse as if nothing was wrong. "Why," he said, "the *Olwen* she is, then."

"And Jean-Paul," he said to himself, "Jean-Paul, *mon vieux*, it might be just as well to be very, very careful."

And so, during the next few days, the days before his son was born, Jean-Paul made his plans. He sat on the jetty at Georges's place, where he could feast his eyes on the *Olwen*, and thought it all out. The French port, as usual, then perhaps one of those villages in the little creeks round by St. David's Head. Or perhaps further on beyond Fishguard. At any rate, no Wemswy.

He glanced fondly at the *Olwen*, bobbing up and down in the water. "She wants to be off," he thought. "Now there's something a man can be proud of. Good old Georges, I must do something for him. What is it I can do for Georges? . . . . A pity, after all, not to show her to Olwen. She *is* her namesake. Just once, and no harm done—"

Well, you know what the devil's like when he starts his whispering, before you've time to think of the answers, you're lost; and the more Jean-Paul thought about it the more harmless it all seemed. And anyway, he thought, it was only right to bid Olwen good-bye.

And then came the morning Thérèse's son was born, the old midwife running downstairs to tell Jean-Paul the news. He went up to his wife's bedroom. There was Thérèse, lying against the pillows, and there beside her the little bundle of blankets. He kissed Thérèse, looked at the bundle, and in that moment the inspiration came. Here was something he could do for Georges, the little something to show his gratitude.

"Thérèse, *ma petite*," he said. "We'll call him Georges!"

Jean-Paul looked at Thérèse. He hadn't expected her to seem so surprised. Almost, one might think, startled. But then, Jean-Paul decided it was only natural. Of course she would wish to name her firstborn for him, Jean-Paul. Dear Thérèse, there was nothing, almost, that he would not do for her, and had she argued he would have had to think of something else to do for Georges.

But she didn't argue, and when he set out from Lys in the *Olwen* two weeks later it pleased Jean-Paul quite a lot to think of Georges at the christening—big, clumsy, embarrassed Georges, delighted and flattered at the surprising idea of being godfather to Jean-Paul's son.

Jean-Paul had already sent off his letter to Daffyd, telling him that a new consignment was on its way, and the *Olwen* put in at the French port and turned north with the cargo to Wemswy.

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And for the last time, Jean-Paul assured himself. Quite safe this once, he thought! Thérèse was too busy with little Georges to listen to gossip. He would just show Olwen the boat, and not go into Olwen's house.

But nothing seemed to go right. A storm blew up beyond the Scillies, and they were driven miles off their course, buffeted by winds and rain; and when at last the *Olwen* limped into Wemswy harbour the thought of the cottage beyond the jetty and the warm and welcoming arms of Olwen was too much for Jean-Paul. And after the cargo was piled into the van for Haverfordwest he climbed up the steps to the cottage door and softly knocked his own special knock.

Poor Jean-Paul; this was not his lucky night. Olwen opened the door and warned him to come in quietly. "You'll wake Jean-Paul," she said.

Jean-Paul followed her into the little living-room and she lit an oil lamp on the table.

"Jean-Paul?" he said. He peered at Olwen as she carried the lamp across the room and held it above a wooden cradle in the corner.

"My son," she said. "You didn't know, did you? It's been a long time."

"But—"

"His name's Jean-Paul," said Olwen. She paused. "My husband suggested it." Jean-Paul stared at her for a while and then looked down at the baby.

Can't you imagine the expression on Jean-Paul's face as he stood there looking down at that cradle, thinking all the thoughts that would come to any man, however simple-minded, in the circumstances? The child in this cradle, the young Jean-Paul, named for him. The baby in the cradle at home, named for Georges . . .

But then, with a sudden feeling of shame, he remembered Georges's generosity about the boat, so that he could go back to sea. After all, he was grateful to Georges. That was why he had named his own son Georges. This was different. Quite different. He sighed with relief.

"That was nice of Daffyd," he said.

Olwen smiled. "He said he was grateful to you," she said. "A fine partnership, that's what he said."

★ ★ ★

Methods of locomotion have improved greatly in recent years, but places to go to remain about the same.

DON HEROLD

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THE PLAY'S THE THING

There's no business like show business

An empty theatre is romantic, every actor knows the feeling of it: complete silence emphasized rather than broken by the dim traffic noises outside, apparently hundreds of miles away; the muffled sound of a motor horn and the thin reedy wail of a penny whistle being played to the gallery queue.

As a rule there are a few exit lights left burning, casting blue shadows across the rows of empty seats. It seems incredible that within an hour or two this stillness will awake to garish red-and-gilt splendour, and be shattered by the sibilance of hundreds of voices, and the exciting discords and trills of the orchestra tuning up.

NOEL COWARD, *Present Indicative*.

Curtain Up!

To Glasgow and the last-minute six-and-sixpenny upper-box.
The excited programme, no time for a wet in the bar,
The Sickert plush and the white arm adoring the 'cello,
Sweet excitement of strings, and up like a trumpet note flies the easy curtain
And Richard of England comes limping into the thick air
Of velvet and drums, crowns and ermine and scarlet,
And the wanton flags licking like tongues the brilliant blue bowl of the morning.

CHARLES CAUSLEY, *Laurence Olivier's Richard III*

Full House

Let all of you who are poor in spirit and pure in heart hope that you will feast upon the same joy in heaven as that which was nightly dispensed to the admirers of the Di Napoli-Della Rossa Theatrical Company. Some people had such fits of laughter that they bit their own shoes, others managed to stave off death from apoplexy only by clinging to their neighbours (and occasionally relieving them of their wallets into the bargain).

The younger element literally stood on their heads or hands with excitement, howling out their appreciation from the top gallery. The *carabinieri* on duty in the theatre, usually young recruits from Casoria or Benevento, fell to the floor in convulsions of mirth, unintentionally shooting off their revolvers in a way

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which went unnoticed unless it resulted in either accidental murder or suicide. One evening a fair lady in one of the stage boxes lay prostrate with her legs up in the air, affording us a generous view of her anatomy, because of a devastating *double-entendre* in the text of "The Sleeping-Car Conductor."

GIUSEPPE MAROTTA, *Neapolitan Gold*

Bad Influence

The City neither likes us nor our wit,
They say their Wives learn ogling in the Pit;
They're from the Boxes taught to make Advances,
To answer stolen Sighs and naughty Glances . . .

THOMAS SHADWELL, c. 1642–92

Artiste's Temperament

I was crossing over the bridge, my pale face ravaged with grief, and the *sortie de bal* which was intended to cover my shoulder was dragging along just held by my limp fingers; my arms were hanging down as though despair had taken the use out of them. I was bathed in the white light of the moon, and the effect, it seems, was striking and deeply impressive. A nasal, aggressive voice cried out, "One moon effect is enough. Turn it off for Mademoiselle Bernhardt."

I sprang to the front of the stage. "Excuse me, Monsieur Perrin," I exclaimed, "you have no right to take my moon away. The manuscript reads, *Berthe advances, pale, convulsed with emotion, the rays of the moon falling on her . . .* I am pale and I am convulsed. I must have my moon."

SARAH BERNHARDT, *My Double Life*

Behind the Scenes

At the top of the staircase the piled up side-scenes made so many ways and angles that Kate had to keep close to Dick for fear of getting lost. However, at last they arrived in the wings, where gas-lights were burning blankly on the whitewashed walls. A crowd of loud-voiced, perspiring girls, in short fancy petticoats and with bare necks and arms, pushed their way towards the mysterious and ladder-like staircases and scrambled up them. Ange Pitou had taken off his cocked hat and was sharing a pint of beer with Clairette. It being her turn to drink, she said:

"Noe, hold my skirts in, there's a dear; this beer plays the devil with white satin."

GEORGE MOORE, *A Mummer's Wife*

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Dress Rehearsal

BOTTOM: *Masters, you ought to consider with yourselves: to bring in—God shield us!—a lion among ladies, is a most dreadful thing; for there is not a more fearful wildfowl than your lion living . . .*

SNOUT: *Therefore, another prologue must tell he is not a lion.*

BOTTOM: *Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck; and he must himself speak through, saying thus, or to the same defect, "Ladies, I would entreat you, not to fear, not to tremble: my life for yours. If you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life: no, I am no such thing: I am a man as other men are:" and there indeed let him name his name and tell them plainly he is Snug the joiner.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Finale

The first scene, in which there was nobody particular, passed off calmly enough, but when Miss Snevellicci went on in the second, accompanied by the Phenomenon as child, what a roar of applause broke out! The people in the Borum box rose as one man, waving their hats and handkerchiefs and uttering shouts of "Bravo!" . . . A young officer, supposed to entertain a passion for Miss Snevellicci, stuck his glass in his eye as though to hide a tear . . .

And when, at last . . . Mrs. Grudden lighted the blue fire, and all the unemployed members of the company came in, and tumbled down in various directions—not because that had anything to do with the plot, but in order to finish off with a tableau—the audience (who had by this time increased considerably) gave vent to such a shout of enthusiasm, as had not been heard in those walls for many and many a day.

CHARLES DICKENS, *Nicholas Nickleby*

Exeunt Omnes

The curtain falls, the play is played:
The Beggar packs beside the Beau;
The Monarch troops, and troops the Maid;
The Thunder huddles with the Snow.
Where are the revellers high and low?
The clashing swords? The lover's call?
The dancers gleaming row on row?
Into the night go one and all.

W. E. HENLEY, *A Ballade of Dead Actors*

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MOCKING-BIRD

Among the cacti, under the silver sun, the idea came to me

by LORD DUNSANY

"AND it was only a damned mocking-bird," I heard someone say, just as I came into the dining-room of the Billiards Club. It was one of our members evidently trying to tell us a story of far lands. But Jorkens broke in before he got any further, with the words: "I don't like to hear a mocking-bird spoken of like that. I don't like it."

"Why not?" asked the would-be story-teller.

"Because one of them once saved my life," said Jorkens. And after that, though we are usually fair in the Billiards Club and let a man tell his story, no one encouraged the poor fellow to go on, and idle curiosity led us instead to listen only to Jorkens.

Yes (said Jorkens), I had come to a most delightful place at the edge of the Mojave Desert. They called it an apartment hotel, and there on the extreme edge of civilization they had all the comforts of cities, including a swimming-bath with a lawn all round it, the last bit of grass and the last pool of water that there was for a hundred miles. And they'd a very fine gramophone there, and records of all the best music. The proprietress had fine taste and she often put the gramophone out on the grass of the little lawn that their hose had won from the desert, so that you could swim through a symphony of Beethoven; and birds sat in the palm trees overhead, seeming to enjoy the music as much as I did. A delightful place.

Well, I hadn't come that far to see an apartment hotel, however charming it was, and I wanted to see something of the desert. So after careful inquiries, I decided to go for a walk. I wanted to say I had seen more of the desert than you can see from the window of that hotel. And so I did.

What I found out was that there was a road going straight across it, barely twenty miles away, a tarmac road with a white line down the middle of it, and never five minutes on any part of it without seeing two motors passing each other, and sometimes even a bus. Well, I said I would walk there; not, of course,

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all in one walk; ten miles before the sun got too hot, rest and lunch in the heat of the day; then six miles more and tea about 4 o'clock, and four miles more to the road. If I were tired and going a bit slow and chanced to be overtaken by sunset, that wouldn't matter, as I should be able to see the lights of the motors all the last lap of my journey.

At a pinch I could have done the first ten miles in little over two hours. But there was no hurry. They warned me not to do it. I was younger in those days than I am now, and I rather resented warnings, and I asked them why they were warning me. Because I might lose my direction, they said, and miss the road, and then the Mojave would take care of my bones. That, I pointed out to them, was perfectly impossible, because there was a range of distant mountains all the way to my right, and all I had to do was to walk parallel to them, and, as the road ran right across the desert and into those very mountains, I could not possibly miss my way and was bound to strike the road somewhere. Very well, they said.

I started immediately after breakfast. I didn't bother to take any water, but I had plenty of tea in a vacuum flask and plenty to eat, so that I was fully provided for each meal I intended to take in the desert. But I have since learned a curious thing about deserts and jungles, which is that you never know for certain how many meals you will need in them, or how long you will be there: in fact, plans, I don't know why, don't seem quite to apply to them.

Well, I started off, feeling very fresh, and in the mood for a good walk; and there were the mountains on my right; not merely a range, but a row of serrated peaks that gave you your position exactly, for you only had to remember just what any peaks looked like and by walking back and still keeping parallel you could easily return to any point you had passed.

What puzzled me was how sensible people could even talk of getting lost in that desert. I walked on, throwing a glance every now and then at the mountains that guided me straight to where the big road must be. There was no track or path of any sort; only cacti and sage-brush and yuccas, and plenty of space to walk on the sand between them. I took a glance as I walked between two cacti, and there were the mountains, peak after peak to guide me; and then I took another and they were gone. There was rather a yellowish haze, but no mountains.

The idea of turning back, which occurred to me for a moment, seemed silly. I felt that, if I couldn't walk straight without a range of mountains to guide me, I couldn't write a letter without somebody ruling the lines for me.

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I kept on until I felt that it was about lunch-time. I sat down and looked for something to lean against while I ate my lunch. Do you know, there was nothing. There was nothing in all that desert that hadn't spikes; steel spikes, you would say if you touched them, all as sharp as hundreds of needles. Well, that didn't matter: I leant on one elbow and pulled out some very good sandwiches. Then something whispered to me over one of the cacti, and never stopped whispering all that day, and the night and the day after, and it was the Santanna.

The Santanna is like any rainy wind, or more like a blizzard, only it carries sand instead of rain or snow. It was the Santanna that had blotted out the mountains. It gets its name from its birth-place, a canyon called Sant' Anna, or so they say. I shouldn't call it by the name of a saint, myself; something more hellish would seem to suit it better. But it's their wind, and Californians have every right to give it any name that may please them. I drank all the tea in my vacuum flask, leaving nothing for tea-time, and then went on. I knew the direction and didn't need any mountains to guide me, and it was only another ten miles. And still the Santanna blew.

I didn't make such good going as I had expected, because the sand was in my boots and in my hair and my ears, and all my pockets were full of it. I calculated that by tea-time I hadn't done more than three miles, and there wasn't any tea.

The Spanish Bayonet, a tall thin spiky cactus with a red flower flaming at the tip of it, was bending with the Santanna, and all the chaparral was sighing with it. I did about two miles more, which didn't seem much, but it was quite enough, and I decided that, though the motor-road should now be only five miles ahead, it would do just as well to strike it next morning. So I lay down and made myself as comfortable as I could on a bit of sand where there were no cacti.

Their huge bulging shapes were all round me, shining in such light as there was with what seemed almost a golden bloom, but which was only dense clusters of needle-like spikes. And then the night-flowering cactus began to bloom and opened its large flowers. Through the gusts of sand a few stars began to appear, and I made myself a pillow by scraping some sand together. And still the Santanna blew.

The night was all full of whispers, but I paid no attention to them, and after a while I was able to get to sleep. The cold very soon woke me, but then I got to sleep again. It was a tussle between my fatigue and the cold for a while, then the fatigue won.

I was not called so punctually as one usually is in the desert, and the sun had got some way above the horizon before I realized

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that it was trying to call me. When I did, I took a look at the Mojave. There were huge round cushions littered about, looking soft and golden, sometimes with a brilliant flower blazing upon them like a scarlet rose on a pincushion. And then there was a Spanish Bayonet leaning over me, and shaking its blood-red tips at me with every gust that the Santanna blew. A lizard ran out of a green patch of sage-brush and stopped still and looked at me with one eye, and then turned his head and looked at me with the other, and satisfied himself I was lost.

It was an idea that had never occurred to me, but I saw it in the expression of the lizard. I said "Shoo! Go away!" And he went away, but in a quite leisurely manner, and I could see he wasn't afraid of me any longer, because he knew I was lost. Well, the only thing to do was to go on in what I thought was the right direction. But as the sun rose higher, all silver through the Santanna, I knew that the lizard was right. Right or wrong, I kept on and on, sticking to my direction, and as I went I baked, not in the heat of the sun, but in the heat with which it had toasted and fried the Santanna. You have to be a cactus to endure that for long.

And then came noon, with the silver sun high overhead like a full moon, and I knew I must have done many more miles than would take me across that motor-road; and there was no motor-road there.

Well, one thing led to another, heat, thirst, and annoyance at the mountains for being such futile guides, and I had to make up my mind that I was lost. I sat down and had to admit the Mojave had won. There's a nice little graveyard in Surrey in the parish in which I live, and I always used to fancy that I would be buried in a corner of that; but now it would be the Mojave, with the Santanna as sexton and mourner, and its whispers the only service. There was nothing to do except wait.

And then on the scarlet crest of a Spanish Bayonet a mocking-bird alighted. I knew it at once by its long tail and the white bars on its wings—a bird about the size of an English thrush. Hardly had the Spanish Bayonet stopped swaying, when it lifted its voice and sang. Then it put its head on one side and looked at me, to see how I might like it. And then it sang again.

It was a bar of music that I recognized at once. And when it sang it a third time there could be no possible doubt. "How do you like that?" it seemed to be saying, with its head on one side again. Well, I was expecting to die, and delirium comes before death in a desert, and this, I said, is delirium. But I had not expected it quite so soon. Once more the bird sang that phrase. Then it dived from the Spanish Bayonet and flew away. And, do you know, what it had been singing was a bar

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of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, the one that comes just before the chorus begins? One couldn't be mistaken about it.

Well, I said, if one must become delirious before one dies, that is the pleasantest kind of delirium one could have. And then the mocking-bird came back to the same Spanish Bayonet and put its head on one side again, as though to say, "Would you like some more?" And it sang the same bar again. Again its head on one side, "Yes, that's it," it seemed to be saying.

And somehow, in all that loneliness among the cacti and sand and the ceaseless whispers of the Santanna under the silver sun, the idea came to me that the bird might be real. He looked so real, every feather of him, and, if real, his song might be too. And, if all that were real, I was not delirious, and was still able to reason. So I did.

Slowly, I worked it out like this: those birds don't live in deserts, and if they did, they wouldn't hear Beethoven there. They can mimic anything, and that bird must have come from somewhere where a musician was living, or someone fond of good music, and must often have heard that symphony. Where could it be? Those birds, so far as I knew their habits, didn't fly very far. Could I have come to the motor-road after all?

I looked ahead and there wasn't a sign of it. Then I watched the mocking-bird. Theseus in the labyrinth of the Minotaur couldn't have watched the thread of Ariadne more carefully, for without that bird I was lost. It dived again and flew off and I watched it as far as I could through the Santanna. Then I walked in that direction, still hoping the bird was real.

But do you know, I hadn't walked five hundred yards, when a veil of the Santanna lifted up for a moment and I saw through it a green lawn with a gramophone on it, and a pool of water, and the water wasn't a mirage. I had walked in a circle, and come to that pleasant hotel where they asked me if I would like a drink. What an absurd question! My tongue was too parched to tell them so, but I made a sign and they understood at once.

"I made it like this. Try making it to that waiter. He'll probably understand too. I must have been talking a lot, for I'm pretty dry. Thank you."

★ ★ ★

DE RERUM NATURA

There are in nature neither rewards nor punishments—there are consequences.

R. G. INGERSOLL, *Some Reasons Why*

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THE DORCHESTER
LONDON
TELEPHONE MAYFAIR 8888

22nd October, 1953.

Dear Editor,

If you want to re-print an old story of mine, and presumably a short one, I suggest either "The Verger" or "Mr. Know-All," which owing to the cinema have become very popular. I myself prefer "The Colonel's Lady" which is not long either.

Yours sincerely,

W. S. Maugham

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THE COLONEL'S LADY

by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

W. Somerset Maugham celebrates his eightieth birthday on 25th January. Brilliant novelist and playwright, he has long been known to Argosy readers as a master of the art of the short story. In honour of this notable occasion, Argosy pays tribute to Mr. Maugham by presenting to readers the world over his favourite choice among his own stories.

ALL this happened two or three years before the outbreak of the war.

The Peregrines were having breakfast. Though they were alone and the table was long they sat at opposite ends of it. From the walls George Peregrine's ancestors, painted by the fashionable painters of the day, looked down upon them. The butler brought in the morning post. There were several letters for the colonel, business letters, *The Times* and a small parcel for his wife Evie. He looked at his letters and then, opening *The Times*, began to read it. They finished breakfast and rose from the table. He noticed that his wife hadn't opened the parcel.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Only some books."

"Shall I open it for you?"

"If you like."

He hated to cut string and so with some difficulty untied the knots.

"But they're all the same," he said when he had unwrapped the parcel. "What on earth d'you want six copies of the same book for?" He opened one of them. "Poetry." Then he looked at the title-page. *When Pyramids Decay*, he read, by E. K. Hamilton. Eva Katherine Hamilton: that was his wife's maiden name. He looked at her with smiling surprise. "Have you written a book, Evie? You are a slyboots."

"I didn't think it would interest you very much. Would you like a copy?"

"Well, you know poetry isn't much in my line, but—yes, I'd like a copy; I'll read it. I'll take it along to my study. I've got a lot to do this morning."

He gathered up *The Times*, his letters and the book, and went

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out. His study was a large and comfortable room, with a big desk, leather armchairs and what he called "trophies of the chase" on the walls. On the bookshelves were works of reference, books on farming, gardening, fishing and shooting, and books on the last war, in which he had won an M.C. and a D.S.O. For before his marriage he had been in the Welsh Guards.

At the end of the war he retired and settled down to the life of a country gentleman in the spacious house, some twenty miles from Sheffield, which one of his forbears had built in the reign of George III. George Peregrine had an estate of some fifteen hundred acres which he managed with ability; he was a Justice of the Peace and performed his duties conscientiously. During the season he rode to hounds two days a week. He was a good shot, a golfer and though now a little over fifty could still play a hard game of tennis. He could describe himself with propriety as an all-round sportsman.

He had been putting on weight lately, but was still a fine figure of a man; tall, with grey curly hair, only just beginning to grow thin on the crown, frank blue eyes, good features and a high colour. He was a public-spirited man, chairman of any number of local organizations and, as became his class and station, a loyal member of the Conservative Party. He looked upon it as his duty to see to the welfare of the people on his estate and it was a satisfaction to him to know that Evie could be trusted to tend the sick and succour the poor. He had built a cottage hospital on the outskirts of the village and paid the wages of a nurse out of his own pocket.

All he asked of the recipients of his bounty was that at elections, county or general, they should vote for his candidate. He was a friendly man, affable to his inferiors, considerate with his tenants and popular with the neighbouring gentry. He would have been pleased and at the same time slightly embarrassed if someone had told him he was a jolly good fellow. That was what he wanted to be. He desired no higher praise.

It was hard luck that he had no children. He would have been an excellent father, kindly but strict, and would have brought up his sons as gentlemen's sons should be brought up, sent them to Eton, you know, taught them to fish, shoot and ride. As it was, his heir was a nephew, son of his brother killed in a motor accident, not a bad boy, but not a chip off the old block no, sir, far from it; and would you believe it, his fool of a mother was sending him to a co-educational school.

Evie had been a sad disappointment to him. Of course she was a lady, and she had a bit of money of her own; she managed the house uncommonly well and she was a good hostess. The

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village people adored her. She had been a pretty little thing when he married her, with a creamy skin, light brown hair and a trim figure, healthy too and not a bad tennis player; he couldn't understand why she'd had no children; of course, she was faded now, she must be getting on for five-and-forty; her skin was drab, her hair had lost its sheen and she was as thin as a rail. She was always neat and suitably dressed, but she didn't seem to bother how she looked, she wore no make-up and didn't even use lipstick; sometimes at night when she dolled herself up for a party you could tell that once she'd been quite attractive, but ordinarily she was—well, the sort of woman you simply didn't notice.

A nice woman, of course, a good wife, and it wasn't her fault if she was barren, but it was tough on a fellow who wanted an heir of his own loins; she hadn't any vitality, that's what was the matter with her. He supposed he'd been in love with her when he asked her to marry him, at least sufficiently in love for a man who wanted to marry and settle down, but with time he discovered that they had nothing much in common. She didn't care about hunting, and fishing bored her. Naturally they'd drifted apart.

He had to do her the justice to admit that she'd never bothered him. There'd been no scenes. They had no quarrels. She seemed to take it for granted that he should go his own way. When he went up to London now and then she never wanted to come with him. He had a girl there, well, she wasn't exactly a girl, she was thirty-five if she was a day, but she was blonde and luscious and he only had to wire ahead of time and they'd dine, do a show and spend the night together. Well, a man, a healthy normal man had to have some fun in his life. The thought crossed his mind that if Evie hadn't been such a good woman she'd have been a better wife; but it was not the sort of thought that he welcomed and he put it away from him.

George Peregrine finished his *Times* and being a considerate fellow rang the bell and told the butler to take it to Evie. Then he looked at his watch. It was half-past ten and at eleven he had an appointment with one of his tenants. He had half an hour to spare.

"I'd better have a look at Evie's book," he said to himself.

He took it up with a smile. Evie had a lot of highbrow books in her sitting-room, not the sort of books that interested him, but if they amused her he had no objection to her reading them. He noticed that the volume he now held in his hand contained no more than ninety pages. That was all to the good. He shared Edgar Allan Poe's opinion that poems should be short. But

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as he turned the pages he noticed that several of Evie's had long lines of irregular length and didn't rhyme. He didn't like that. At his first school, when he was a little boy, he remembered learning a poem that began: *The boy stood on the burning deck*, and later, at Eton, one that started: *Ruin seize thee, ruthless king ;* and then there was Henry V; they'd had to take that, one half. He stared at Evie's pages with consternation.

" That's not what I call poetry," he said.

Fortunately it wasn't all like that. Interspersed with the pieces that looked so odd, lines of three or four words and then a line of ten or fifteen, there were little poems, quite short, that rhymed, thank God, with the lines all the same length. Several of the pages were just headed with the word *Sonnet*, and out of curiosity he counted the lines; there were fourteen of them. He read them. They seemed all right, but he didn't quite know what they were all about. He repeated to himself: *Ruin seize thee, ruthless king.*

" Poor Evie," he sighed.

At that moment the farmer he was expecting was ushered into the study, and putting the book down he made him welcome. They embarked on their business.

" I read your book, Evie," he said as they sat down to lunch. " Jolly good. Did it cost you a packet to have it printed ? "

" No, I was lucky. I sent it to a publisher and he took it."

" Not much money in poetry, my dear," he said in his good-natured, hearty way.

" No, I don't suppose there is. What did Bannock want to see you about this morning ? "

Bannock was the tenant who had interrupted his reading of Evie's poems.

" He's asked me to advance the money for a pedigree bull he wants to buy. He's a good man and I've half a mind to do it."

George Peregrine saw that Evie didn't want to talk about her book and he was not sorry to change the subject. He was glad she had used her maiden name on the title-page; he didn't suppose anyone would ever hear about the book, but he was proud of his own unusual name and he wouldn't have liked it if some damned penny-a-liner had made fun of Evie's effort in one of the papers.

During the few weeks that followed he thought it tactful not to ask Evie any questions about her venture into verse, and she never referred to it. It might have been a discreditable incident that they had silently agreed not to mention. But then a strange thing happened. He had to go to London on business and he

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took Daphne out to dinner. That was the name of the girl with whom he was in the habit of passing a few agreeable hours whenever he went to town.

"Oh, George," she said, "is that your wife who's written a book they're all talking about?"

"What on earth d'you mean?"

"Well, there's a fellow I know who's a critic. He took me out to dinner the other night and he had a book with him. 'Got anything for me to read?' I said. 'What's that?' 'Oh, I don't think that's your cup of tea,' he said. 'It's poetry. I've just been reviewing it.' 'No poetry for me,' I said. 'It's about the hottest stuff I ever read,' he said. 'Selling like hot cakes. And it's damned good.'"

"Who's the book by?" asked George.

"A woman called Hamilton. My friend told me that wasn't her real name. He said her real name was Peregrine. 'Funny,' I said, 'I know a fellow called Peregrine.' 'Colonel in the army,' he said. 'Lives near Sheffield.'"

"I'd just as soon you didn't talk about me to your friends," said George with a frown of vexation.

"Keep your shirt on, dearie. Who d'you take me for? I just said: 'It's not the same one.'" Daphne giggled. "My friend said: 'They say he's a regular Colonel Blimp.'"

George had a keen sense of humour.

"You could tell them better than that," he laughed. "If my wife had written a book I'd be the first to know about it, wouldn't I?"

"I suppose you would."

Anyhow the matter didn't interest her and when the colonel began to talk of other things she forgot about it. He put it out of his mind too. There was nothing to it, he decided, and that silly fool of a critic had just been pulling Daphne's leg. He was amused at the thought of her tackling that book because she had been told it was hot stuff and then finding it just a lot of bosh cut up into unequal lines.

He was a member of several clubs and next day he thought he'd lunch at one in St. James's Street. He was catching a train back to Sheffield early in the afternoon. He was sitting in a comfortable armchair having a glass of sherry before going into the dining-room when an old friend came up to him.

"Well, old boy, how's life?" he said. "How d'you like being the husband of a celebrity?"

George Peregrine looked at his friend. He thought he saw an amused twinkle in his eyes.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he answered.

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"Come off it, George. Everyone knows E. K. Hamilton is your wife. Not often a book of verse has a success like that. Look here, Henry Dashwood is lunching with me. He'd like to meet you."

"Who the devil is Henry Dashwood and why should he want to meet me?"

"Oh, my dear fellow, what do you do with yourself all the time in the country? Henry's about the best critic we've got. He wrote a wonderful review of Evie's book. D'you mean to say she didn't show it you?"

Before George could answer his friend had called a man over. A tall, thin man, with a high forehead, a beard, a long nose and a stoop, just the sort of man whom George was prepared to dislike at first sight. Introductions were effected. Henry Dashwood sat down.

"Is Mrs. Peregrine in London by any chance? I should very much like to meet her," he said.

"No, my wife doesn't like London. She prefers the country," said George stiffly.

"She wrote me a very nice letter about my review. I was pleased. You know, we critics get more kicks than halfpence. I was simply bowled over by her book. It's so fresh and original, very modern without being obscure. She seems to be as much at her ease in free verse as in the classical metres." Then because he was a critic he thought he should criticize. "Sometimes her ear is a trifle at fault, but you can say the same of Emily Dickinson. There are several of those short lyrics of hers that might have been written by Landor."

All this was gibberish to George Peregrine. The man was nothing but a disgusting highbrow. But the colonel had good manners and he answered with proper civility: Henry Dashwood went on as though he hadn't spoken.

"But what makes the book so outstanding is the passion that throbs in every line. So many of these young poets are so anæmic, cold, bloodless, dully intellectual, but here you have real naked, earthy passion; of course deep, sincere emotion like that is tragic—ah, my dear Colonel, how right Heine was when he said that the poet makes little songs out of his great sorrows. You know, now and then, as I read and re-read those heart-rending pages I thought of Sappho."

This was too much for George Peregrine and he got up.

"Well, it's jolly nice of you to say such nice things about my wife's little book. I'm sure she'll be delighted. But I must bolt, I've got to catch a train and I want to get a bite of lunch."

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"Damned fool," he said irritably to himself as he walked upstairs to the dining-room.

He got home in time for dinner and after Evie had gone to bed he went into his study and looked for her book. He thought he'd just glance through it again to see for himself what they were making such a fuss about, but he couldn't find it. Evie must have taken it away.

"Silly," he muttered.

He'd told her he thought it jolly good. What more could a fellow be expected to say? Well, it didn't matter. He lit his pipe and read *The Field* till he felt sleepy. But a week or so later it happened that he had to go into Sheffield for the day. He lunched there at his club. He had nearly finished when the Duke of Haverel came in. This was the great local magnate and of course the colonel knew him, but only to say how d'you do to; and he was surprised when the Duke stopped at his table.

"We're so sorry your wife couldn't come to us for the week-end," he said, with a sort of shy cordiality. "We're expecting rather a nice lot of people."

George was taken aback. He guessed that the Haverels had asked him and Evie over for the week-end and Evie, without saying a word to him about it, had refused. He had the presence of mind to say he was sorry too.

"Better luck next time," said the Duke pleasantly and moved on.

Colonel Peregrine was very angry and when he got home he said to his wife: "Look here, what's this about our being asked over to Haverel? Why on earth did you say we couldn't go? We've never been asked before and it's the best shooting in the county."

"I didn't think of that. I thought it would only bore you."

"Damn it all, you might at least have asked me if I wanted to go."

"I'm sorry."

He looked at her closely. There was something in her expression that he didn't quite understand. He frowned.

"I suppose *I* was asked?" he barked.

Evie flushed a little. "Well, in point of fact you weren't."

"I call it damned rude of them to ask you without asking me."

"I suppose they thought it wasn't your sort of party. The Duchess is rather fond of writers and people like that, you know. She's having Henry Dashwood, the critic, and for some reason he wants to meet me."

"It was damned nice of you to refuse, Evie."

"It's the least I could do," she smiled. She hesitated a moment. "George, my publishers want to give a little dinner

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party for me one day towards the end of the month and of course they want you to come too."

"Oh, I don't think that's quite my mark. I'll come up to London with you if you like. I'll find someone to dine with." Daphne.

"I expect it'll be very dull, but they're making rather a point of it. And the day after, the American publisher who's taken my book is giving a cocktail party. I'd like you to come to that if you wouldn't mind."

"Sounds like a crashing bore, but if you really want me to come I'll come."

"It would be sweet of you."

George Peregrine was dazed by the cocktail party. There were a lot of people. Some of them didn't look so bad, a few of the women were decently turned out, but the men seemed to him pretty awful. He was introduced to everyone as Colonel Peregrine, E. K. Hamilton's husband, you know. The men didn't seem to have anything to say to him, but the women gushed.

"You *must* be proud of your wife. Isn't it *wonderful?* You know, I read it right through at a sitting, I simply couldn't put it down, and when I'd finished I started again at the beginning and read it right through a second time. I was simply *thrilled.*"

The English publisher said to him: "We've not had a success like this with a book of verse for twenty years. I've never seen such reviews."

The American publisher said to him: "It's swell. It'll be a smash hit in America. You wait and see."

The American publisher had sent Evie a great spray of orchids. Damned ridiculous, thought George. As they came in, people were taken up to Evie, and it was evident that they said flattering things to her, which she took with a pleasant smile and a word or two of thanks. She was a trifle flushed with the excitement, but seemed quite at her ease. Though he thought the whole thing a lot of stuff and nonsense George noted with approval that his wife was carrying it off in just the right way.

"Well, there's one thing," he said to himself, "you can see she's a lady and that's a damned sight more than you can say of anyone else here."

He drank a good many cocktails. But there was one thing that bothered him. He had a notion that some of the people he was introduced to looked at him in rather a funny sort of way, he couldn't quite make out what it meant, and once when he strolled by two women who were sitting together on a sofa he

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had the impression that they were talking about him and after he passed he was almost certain they tittered. He was very glad when the party came to an end.

In the taxi on their way back to their hotel Evie said to him: "You were wonderful, dear. You made quite a hit. The girls simply raved about you: they thought you so handsome."

"Girls," he said bitterly. "Old hags."

"Were you bored, dear?"

"Stiff."

She pressed his hand in a gesture of sympathy. "I hope you won't mind if we wait and go down by the afternoon train. I've got some things to do in the morning."

"No, that's all right. Shopping?"

"I do want to buy one or two things, but I've got to go and be photographed. I hate the idea, but they think I ought to be. For America, you know."

He said nothing. But he thought. He thought it would be a shock to the American public when they saw the portrait of the homely, desiccated little woman who was his wife. He'd always been under the impression that they liked glamour in America.

He went on thinking, and next morning when Evie had gone out he went to his club and up to the library. There he looked up recent numbers of *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The New Statesman* and *The Spectator*. Presently he found reviews of Evie's book. He didn't read them very carefully, but enough to see that they were extremely favourable. Then he went to the bookseller's in Piccadilly where he occasionally bought books. He'd made up his mind that he had to read this damned thing of Evie's properly, but he didn't want to ask her what she'd done with the copy she'd given him. He'd buy one for himself. Before going in he looked in the window and the first thing he saw was a display of *When Pyramids Decay*. Damned silly title! He went in. A young man came forward and asked if he could help him.

"No, I'm just having a look round." It embarrassed him to ask for Evie's book and he thought he'd find it for himself and then take it to the salesman. But he couldn't see it anywhere and at last, finding the young man near him, he said in a carefully casual tone: "By the way, have you got a book called *When Pyramids Decay?*"

"The new edition came in this morning. I'll get a copy."

In a moment the young man returned with it. He was a short, rather stout young man, with a shock of untidy carroty hair and spectacles. George Peregrine, tall, upstanding, very military, towered over him.

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"Is this a new edition then?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. The fifth. It might be a novel the way it's selling."

George Peregrine hesitated a moment. "Why d'you suppose it's such a success? I've always been told no one reads poetry."

"Well, it's good, you know. I've read it meself." The young man, though obviously cultured, had a slight Cockney accent, and George quite instinctively adopted a patronizing attitude. "It's the story they like. Sexy, you know, but tragic."

George frowned a little. He was coming to the conclusion that the young man was rather impertinent. No one had told him anything about there being a story in the damned book and he had not gathered that from reading the reviews.

The young man went on: "Of course it's only a flash in the pan, if you know what I mean. The way I look at it, she was sort of inspired like by a personal experience, like Housman was with *The Shropshire Lad*. She'll never write anything else."

"How much is the book?" said George coldly to stop his chatter. "You needn't wrap it up, I'll just slip it into my pocket."

The November morning was raw and he was wearing a great-coat.

At the station he bought the evening papers and magazines and he and Evie settled themselves comfortably in opposite corners of a first-class carriage and read. At five o'clock they went along to the restaurant car to have tea and chatted a little. They arrived. They drove home in the car which was waiting for them. They bathed, dressed for dinner, and after dinner Evie, saying she was tired out, went to bed. She kissed him, as was her habit, on the forehead. Then he went into the hall, took Evie's book out of his greatcoat pocket and going into the study began to read it.

He didn't read verse very easily and though he read with attention, every word of it, the impression he received was far from clear. Then he began at the beginning again and read it a second time. He read with increasing malaise, but he was not a stupid man and when he had finished he had a distinct understanding of what it was all about. Part of the book was in free verse, part in conventional metres, but the story it related was coherent and plain to the meanest intelligence. It was the story of a passionate love affair between an older woman, married, and a young man. George Peregrine made out the steps of it as easily as if he had been doing a sum in simple addition.

Written in the first person, it began with the tremulous surprise of the woman, past her youth, when it dawned upon her that the young man was in love with her. She hesitated to believe

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it. She thought she must be deceiving herself. And she was terrified when on a sudden she discovered that she was passionately in love with him. She told herself it was absurd; with the disparity of age between them nothing but unhappiness could come to her if she yielded to her emotion. She tried to prevent him from speaking but the day came when he told her that he loved her and forced her to tell him that she loved him too. He begged her to run away with him. She couldn't leave her husband, her home; and what life could they look forward to, she an ageing woman, he so young? How could she expect his love to last? She begged him to have mercy on her. But his love was impetuous. He wanted her, he wanted her with all his heart, and at last trembling, afraid, desirous, she yielded to him.

Then there was a period of ecstatic happiness. The world, the dull, humdrum world of every day, blazed with glory. Love songs flowed from her pen. The woman worshipped the young, virile body of her lover. George flushed darkly when she praised his broad chest and slim flanks, the beauty of his legs and the flatness of his belly.

Hot stuff, Daphne's friend had said. It was that all right. Disgusting.

There were sad little pieces in which she lamented the emptiness of her life when as must happen he left her, but they ended with a cry that all she had to suffer would be worth it for the bliss that for a while had been hers. She wrote of the long, tremulous nights they passed together and the languor that lulled them to sleep in one another's arms. She wrote of the rapture of brief stolen moments when, braving all danger, their passion overwhelmed them and they surrendered to its call.

She thought it would be an affair of a few weeks, but miraculously it lasted. One of the poems referred to three years having gone by without lessening the love that filled their hearts. It looked as though he continued to press her to go away with him, far away, to a hill town in Italy, a Greek island, a walled city in Tunisia, so that they could be together always, for in another of the poems she besought him to let things be as they were. Their happiness was precarious. Perhaps it was owing to the difficulties they had to encounter and the rarity of their meetings that their love had retained for so long its first enchanting ardour.

Then on a sudden the young man died. How, when or where George could not discover. There followed a long, heart-broken cry of bitter grief, grief she could not indulge in, grief that had to be hidden. She had to be cheerful, give dinner-parties and go out to dinner, behave as she had always behaved, though the

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light had gone out of her life and she was bowed down with anguish. The last poem of all was a set of four short stanzas in which the writer, sadly resigned to her loss, thanked the dark powers that rule man's destiny that she had been privileged at least for a while to enjoy the greatest happiness that we poor human beings can ever hope to know.

It was three o'clock in the morning when George Peregrine finally put the book down. It had seemed to him that he heard Evie's voice in every line, over and over again he came upon turns of phrase he had heard her use, there were details that were as familiar to him as to her: there was no doubt about it; it was her own story she had told, and it was as plain as anything could be that she had had a lover and her lover had died.

It was not anger so much that he felt, nor horror or dismay, though he was dismayed and he was horrified, but amazement. It was as inconceivable that Evie should have had a love affair, and a wildly passionate one at that, as that the trout in a glass case over the chimney piece in his study, the finest he had ever caught, should suddenly wag its tail.

He understood now the meaning of the amused look he had seen in the eyes of that man he had spoken to at the club, he understood why Daphne when she was talking about the book had seemed to be enjoying a private joke, and why those two women at the cocktail party had tittered when he strolled past them.

He broke out into a sweat. Then on a sudden he was seized with fury and he jumped up to go and awake Evie and ask her sternly for an explanation. But he stopped at the door. After all, what proof had he? A book. He remembered that he'd told Evie he thought it jolly good. True, he hadn't read it, but he'd pretended he had. He would look a perfect fool if he had to admit that.

"I must watch my step," he muttered.

He made up his mind to wait for two or three days and think it all over. Then he'd decide what to do. He went to bed, but he couldn't sleep for a long time.

"Evie," he kept on saying to himself. "Evie, of all people."

They met at breakfast next morning as usual. Evie was as she always was, quiet, demure and self-possessed, a middle-aged woman who made no effort to look younger than she was, a woman who had nothing of what he still called It. He looked at her as he hadn't looked at her for years. She had her usual placid serenity. Her pale blue eyes were untroubled. There was no sign of guilt on her candid brow. She made the same little casual remarks she always made.

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"It's nice to get back to the country again after those two hectic days in London. What are you going to do this morning?"

It was incomprehensible.

Three days later he went to see his solicitor. Henry Blane was an old friend of George's as well as his lawyer. He had a place not far from Peregrine's and for years they had shot over one another's preserves. For two days a week he was a country gentleman and for the other five a busy lawyer in Sheffield. He was a tall, robust fellow, with a boisterous manner and a jovial laugh, which suggested that he liked to be looked upon essentially as a sportsman and a good fellow and only incidentally as a lawyer. But he was shrewd and wordly-wise.

"Well, George, what's brought you here today?" he boomed as the colonel was shown into his office. "Have a good time in London? I'm taking my missus up for a few days next week. How's Evie?"

"It's about Evie I've come to see you," said Peregrine, giving him a suspicious look. "Have you read her book?"

His sensitivity had been sharpened during those last days of troubled thought and he was conscious of a faint change in the lawyer's expression. It was as though he were suddenly on his guard.

"Yes, I've read it. Great success, isn't it? Fancy Evie breaking out into poetry. Wonders will never cease."

George Peregrine was inclined to lose his temper.

"It's made me look a perfect damned fool."

"Oh, what nonsense, George! There's no harm in Evie's writing a book. You ought to be jolly proud of her."

"Don't talk such rot. It's her own story. You know it and everyone else knows it. I suppose I'm the only one who doesn't know who her lover was."

"There is such a thing as imagination, old boy. There's no reason to suppose the whole thing isn't made up."

"Look here, Henry, we've known one another all our lives. We've had all sorts of good times together. Be honest with me. Can you look me in the face and tell me you believe it's a made-up story?"

Harry Blane moved uneasily in his chair. He was disturbed by the distress in old George's voice.

"You've got no right to ask me a question like that. Ask Evie."

"I daren't," George answered after an anguished pause. "I'm afraid she'd tell me the truth."

There was an uncomfortable silence.

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"Who was the chap?"

Harry Blane looked at him straight in the eye. "I don't know, and if I did I wouldn't tell you."

"You swine. Don't you see what a position I'm in? Do you think it's very pleasant to be made absolutely ridiculous?"

The lawyer lit a cigarette and for some moments silently puffed it. "I don't see what I can do for you," he said at last.

"You've got private detectives you employ, I suppose. I want you to put them on the job and let them find everything out."

"It's not very pretty to put detectives on one's wife, old boy; and besides, taking for granted for a moment that Evie had an affair, it was a good many years ago and I don't suppose it would be possible to find out a thing. They seem to have covered their tracks pretty carefully."

"I don't care. You put the detectives on. I want to know the truth."

"I won't, George. If you're determined to do that you'd better consult someone else. And look here, even if you got evidence that Evie had been unfaithful to you what would you do with it? You'd look rather silly divorcing your wife because she'd committed adultery ten years ago."

"At all events I could have it out with her."

"You can do that now, but you know just as well as I do that if you do she'll leave you. D'you want her to do that?"

George gave him an unhappy look.

"I don't know. I always thought she'd been a damned good wife to me. She runs the house perfectly, we never have any servant trouble; she's done wonders with the garden and she's splendid with all the village people. But damn it, I have my self-respect to think of. How can I go on living with her when I know that she was grossly unfaithful to me?"

"Have you always been faithful to her?"

"More or less, you know. After all, we've been married for nearly twenty-four years and Evie was never much for bed."

The solicitor slightly raised his eyebrows, but George was too intent on what he was saying to notice.

"I don't deny that I've had a bit of fun now and then. A man wants it. Women are different."

"We only have men's word for that," said Harry Blane, with a faint smile.

"Evie's absolutely the last woman I'd have suspected of kicking over the traces. I mean, she's a very fastidious, reticent woman. What on earth made her write the damned book?"

"I suppose it was a very poignant experience and perhaps it was a relief to her to get it off her chest like that."

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"Well, if she had to write it why the devil didn't she write it under an assumed name?"

"She used her maiden name. I suppose she thought that was enough, and it would have been if the book hadn't had this amazing boom."

George Peregrine and the lawyer were sitting opposite one another with a desk between them. George, his elbow on the desk, his cheek on his hand, frowned. "It's so rotten not to know what sort of a chap he was. One can't even tell if he was by way of being a gentleman. I mean, for all I know he may have been a farm-hand or a clerk in a lawyer's office."

Harry Blane did not permit himself to smile and when he answered there was in his eyes a kindly, tolerant look.

"Knowing Evie so well, I think the probabilities are that he was all right. Anyhow I'm sure he wasn't a clerk in my office."

"It's been a shock to me," the colonel sighed. "I thought she was fond of me. She couldn't have written that book unless she hated me."

"Oh, I don't believe that. I don't think she's capable of hatred."

"You're not going to pretend that she loves me."

"No."

"Well, what does she feel for me?"

Harry Blane leaned back in his swivel chair and looked at George reflectively. "Indifference, I should say."

The colonel gave a little shudder and reddened.

"After all, you're not in love with her, are you?"

George Peregine did not answer directly. "It's been a great blow to me not to have any children, but I've never let her see that I think she's let me down. I've always been kind to her. Within reasonable limits I've tried to do my duty by her."

The lawyer passed a large hand over his mouth to conceal the smile that trembled on his lips.

"It's been such an awful shock to me," Peregrine went on. "Damn it all, even ten years ago Evie was no chicken and God knows, she wasn't much to look at. It's so ugly." He sighed deeply. "What would *you* do in my place?"

"Nothing."

George Peregrine drew himself bolt upright and looked at Harry with the stern set face that he must have worn when he inspected his regiment. "I can't overlook a thing like this. I've been made a laughing-stock. I can never hold up my head again."

"Nonsense," said the lawyer sharply, and then in a pleasant, kindly manner. "Listen, old boy: the man's dead; it all happened a long while back. Forget it. Talk to people about

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Evie's book, rave about it, tell 'em how proud you are of her. Behave as though you had so much confidence in her, you *knew* she could never have been unfaithful to you. The world moves so quickly and people's memories are so short. They'll forget."

"I shan't forget."

"You're both middle-aged people. She probably does a great deal more for you than you think and you'd be awfully lonely without her. I don't think it matters if you don't forget. It'll be all to the good if you can get it into that thick head of yours that there's a lot more in Evie than you ever had the gumption to see."

"Damn it all, you talk as if *I* was to blame."

"No, I don't think you were to blame, but I'm not so sure that Evie was, either. I don't suppose she wanted to fall in love with this boy. D'you remember those verses right at the end? The impression they gave me was that though she was shattered by his death, in a strange sort of way she welcomed it. All through she'd been aware of the fragility of the tie that bound them. He died in the full flush of his first love and had never known that love so seldom endures; he'd only known its bliss and beauty. In her own bitter grief she found solace in the thought that he'd been spared all sorrow."

"All that's a bit above my head, old boy. I see more or less what you mean."

George Peregrine stared unhappily at the inkstand on the desk. He was silent and the lawyer looked at him with curious, yet sympathetic, eyes.

"Do you realize what courage she must have had never by a sign to show how dreadfully unhappy she was?" he said gently.

Colonel Peregrine sighed. "I'm broken. I suppose you're right; it's no good crying over spilt milk and it would only make things worse if I made a fuss."

"Well?"

George Peregrine gave a pitiful little smile.

"I'll take your advice. I'll do nothing. Let them think me a damned fool and to hell with them. The truth is, I don't know what I'd do without Evie. But I'll tell you what, there's one thing I shall never understand till my dying day: What in the name of heaven did the fellow ever see in her?"

☆ ☆ ☆

It's better to give than to lend, and it costs about the same.

PHILIP GIBBS

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MASHA IS THE DEVIL

He had seen gold and jewels shining in the moonlight

by WOLF MANKOWITZ

AT one time my great-grandmother had a cow. Not that it was in any way a particularly good cow. It never won any prizes, it sometimes didn't give so much milk, one of its horns had got knocked off, and it would never come when it was called. It was an ordinary cow, a cow like any other, and when my great-grandmother went out at night to call, "Masha, Masha," (because that was its name) she might hear a noise somewhere, of something kicked over, but whether Masha heard my great-grandmother is another matter, because she never answered.

She wandered about all day and at night wandered still, into other people's yards, the street, a ploughed field, all night through, yet never tiring. Sometimes you would see Masha slowly walking over the hill. Those nights it took hours to find her again, and it was no use calling. As a further aggravation, this cow often went up to the ruin on top of the hill and stayed there all day.

You might say: "All right, then, it was an annoying cow. What do you expect from a cow?"

But then you would have missed the whole point. It was an annoying cow, agreed, but going up to the ruins and loafing around them all day is too much, because, you understand, there was a devil up there.

This, of course, is the reason why my great-grandmother's cow gave so little milk. Not because she had a hard time being driven about the place all day, or because she never got enough to eat, but because two or three times a week she went up the hill to the ruins, and while she was there, the devil milked her. So you will agree that Masha was going too far, for who was going to climb a hill simply to be pushed down by a devil? No one would go after Masha.

No one, that is, except my great-grandmother, for she had to cook dinner every day, she had to find something to eat, and for this Masha was essential.

My great-grandmother used to ask the rest of them, "Has anyone seen this devil? What does he look like? Like Sholem

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Pinsk, maybe? Or like your father when he was drunk last time?"

And so she went out every evening to find the cow, and even if it had gone up to the ruins she climbed the hill slowly, calling, "Masha, Masha." Though it happened that she went up the hill many times to bring Masha back to the house, my great-grandmother never saw the devil.

But that is not to say there was no devil to be seen. The time came when even my great-grandmother was shown that the devil was there, although she didn't exactly see him. Why should the devil waste his time showing himself to my great-grandmother? The devil is too busy to spend his time showing off to anyone who happens to walk up a hill looking for a lost cow.

He lived there because he had a very good reason. If not, why should he waste his time at the top of such a little hill when there were so many mountains he could have chosen?

This devil could, in fact, have stayed wherever he fancied, like any other devil, but he chose the hill because of the ruins that were at the top of it. And it was not only the ruins that interested him, but what was hidden in them, for somewhere in those ruins was buried a treasure worth more than the whole village, more than Pinsk, even. No one knew what this treasure was exactly, but it had been hidden in the ruins for many years, and since every one said that there was a treasure, there certainly must have been one.

You might wonder why if there was treasure no one tried to find it. After all, it's something, the chance of finding a fortune and living in a palace for the rest of your life, with servants around you and nothing to do except drink lemon tea and eat chicken all day long. And, naturally, several people had thought that it would not be such a bad thing to find a treasure like this. But then, there was the devil.

What is more, everyone knew the treasure could only be discovered at midnight by the light of a full moon. Why, they were unable to say, but that it was so, no one questioned. Who would bother to invent such a story? It was obviously true, and no matter how much someone wants a fortune it's not worth his while if it means being eaten by a devil. Even a dead lion is worth only the value of his skin, and believe me, not many people are buying lionskin these days.

So this was the situation—at the top of the hill there was a ruin, and in this ruin there was a treasure, and over this treasure there was sitting, or sometimes, maybe, standing or dancing—after all, a devil is a devil—a pretty dangerous devil. Anyone who thought of trying to find the treasure thought first of

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the devil, and then went out to earn a few honest copecks instead.

For most people it would have been enough to know all this. Most people can be relied upon to act sensibly if they know that it will be a lot easier for them if they do so—after all, a devil should be a good enough warning. However, sometimes you come across a man who just won't learn, and then there's no use talking. You must simply take no notice of such men. When they say: "I think I shall go up to the ruin and take the treasure," you simply reply: "Good luck to you. You should have a nice night for it." And then go about your business.

There is such a man in every village and this man is not necessarily large. In my great-grandfather's village he was small and thin, and although he lived in the Jewish village he was not a Jew, but lived there because he had inherited a piece of land. This man was a carpenter and his name was Igor.

Igor never swore. He drank very little, yet he was certainly the most reckless man in the village. Sometimes he turned very quiet for a few days. Then suddenly he would disappear and come back in a day or two with a couple of wolfskins, and once he came back with a dead bear.

Once he dug up the whole of the village street without saying a word to anyone. Suddenly one morning he was found standing there, with the whole street dug up. Naturally he put all the rubbish back when it was pointed out to him that the road being dug up made it difficult for people to pass. That was the sort of thing he used to do, yet in spite of this, everyone took him their trade, when they needed a coffin. Igor made good plain coffins of a seasoned wood which did not, like your cheap coffins, rot away in no time. They would last a lifetime.

Mind you, sometimes you felt uncomfortable when you met him, for as a result of measuring up so many people for their coffins, he always looked you up and down, as if working out how much timber you would need. That sort of look makes you feel a little cold, particularly if lately you have not been feeling so well.

This Igor may have been reckless when he dug up the village street for no reason at all but, at least, there was—if the constable was not around—no danger in that. But when he suddenly came into my great-grandfather's workshop and said: "I think that I shall go and find the treasure up on the hill," it was something different. After all, what man, even if he is very strong, can hope to do well against a devil? A man is a man, and when he starts interfering with his betters, his chances of doing good business are worth a blown-out egg.

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But that is what Igor said, and my great-grandfather could see that he meant it. After drinking a few glasses of brandy, they shook hands and Igor went off to wait until the moon came up.

That very night my great-grandmother's cow decided to loaf about when she should have been at home. Of course, Igor was not a man to worry whether a skinny old cow was either here or there. He did what he had to do, regardless of cows.

Igor had a few more brandies as he put the finishing touches to a beautiful coffin he was making for a small, very square, fat man he had studied with interest for some time. It was a good coffin and was sure to come in handy. When he had finished both the coffin and a bottle of brandy, he went out to the hill.

At the same time my great-grandmother was calling out from her yard: "Masha, Mashkele! Where are you, darling?" although she knew that the cow never answered.

Igor went up the hill, and once or twice he thought he heard someone calling, but he did not wait. He went straight up towards the ruins and settled down on a bank of grass with bushes growing on it. My great-grandmother called out again after the cow: "What are you doing, then?"

This time Igor heard. He stood up, all on guard. Again she cried: "Well, why do you wait, you beast?" Igor shouted back: "You are the beast, you old devil."

Now, when my great-grandmother heard a voice reply, she realized something unusual was going on. Masha the cow never answered, she never cared who waited for her, and here for the first time, a voice replied to my great-grandmother, calling her an old devil, into the bargain.

My great-grandmother was not the woman to stand for insults. At once she shouted back: "I shall flay you alive, you dog!"

And this made Igor—who was a little drunk—remember what he had heard about the devil. Igor felt, for the first time, a little afraid. Nevertheless, he was determined to find the treasure, so he climbed up the wall and began to feel around the top of it with one hand while holding onto the stones with the other.

My great-grandmother was by now beginning to worry about Masha, and she shouted as she walked up the hill, "Where are you, little skinny beast?"

At this insult Igor—who was, you will remember, a little thin man—turned round to shout back, and saw, just below him, a single horn sticking up, and a great face with a dribbling mouth looking at him. At that moment my great-grandmother shouted, "I shall make you sorry you climbed up there."

Now Igor was more than worried, for he knew he was as good

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as dead. Wondering if they would bury him in the short coffin he had made for the fat man, he fell down into the long grass crying: "The devil is eating me!"

Now, my great-grandmother could tell from all this that there was someone on the hill, and even she felt a little afraid. Then suddenly she saw a black shape charging towards her, because, for a change, Masha had decided to move in the right direction.

My great-grandmother turned and ran, deciding that even if it wasn't actually the devil chasing her, a good woman couldn't be too careful, and whatever it was, she didn't like it. She ran all the way back, and locked the door, waking everyone up.

My grandfather looked out from on top of the stove where he slept. "The devil played monkey-tricks with me," cried his mother (my great-grandmother). And all the chickens flew out from underneath the stove, kicking up a terrible fuss.

My great-grandfather looked very grave when he heard the whole story. "You, running about the countryside all night like a mad woman shouting out, 'Masha, Mashkele,'" he said. "You should be ashamed. I suppose now you'll believe clever men who say that there is a devil here or a devil there? Have a little respect in future." And he went out to find Igor.

When Igor told him how he had seen gold and jewels shining in the moonlight, my great-grandfather asked him if he had perhaps managed to bring a little away. He was very disappointed when he heard that just as Igor was about to reach out for the treasure, the jealous devil pushed him down and spat on him.

But as he wisely observed: "At least, it proves that there must certainly be a treasure up there. For if not, why should the devil push you down? The devil is not a person to waste his time pushing people for no reason."

And Igor sadly replied: "If there was not a devil, then I should have got the treasure. A poor man can do no right."

As for the cow, no one knew what became of her that night, though she came back the following day. My great-grandmother noticed that she didn't look as pleased with herself as usual, though, of course, she still gave a little milk, which was welcome, and still she refused to come when called. But after this my great-grandmother said she didn't care. For her part, the cow could loaf around the ruins every night if she liked. She could stay there and be roasted, for all my great-grandmother cared.

★ ★ ★

Conscience: the inner voice which warns us that someone may be looking.

H. L. MENCKEN

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A BENCH IN THE PARK

The common sun, the air, the skies
To him are open paradise

There were a number of people out this afternoon, far more than last Sunday. And the band sounded louder and gayer. That was because the Season had begun. For although the band played all the year round on Sundays, out of season it was never the same. It was like someone playing with only the family to listen; it didn't care how it played if there weren't any strangers present. Wasn't the conductor wearing a new coat, too? She was sure it was new. He scraped with his foot and flapped his arms like a rooster about to crow, and the bandsmen sitting in the green rotunda blew out their cheeks and glared at the music. Now there came a little "flutey" bit—very pretty!—a little chain of bright drops. She was sure it would be repeated. It was; she lifted her head and smiled.

KATHERINE MANSFIELD, *Miss Brill*

Bandstand

Astounding the bucolic grass,
The bandsmen sweat in golds and reds
And put their zeal into the brass.
A glorious flustered major heads

Their sort of stationary charge.
Their lips are pursed, their cheeks get pink;
The instruments are very large
Through which they render Humperdinck.

The sailors and the parlourmaids
Both vote the music jolly good,
But do not worry if it fades
As they stroll deeper in the wood,

Where twenty French horns wouldn't stir
A leaf. The intrepid band trying not
To mind the applause (as though it were
A testing fusillade of shot),

Polish their mouthpieces and cough,
Then throw their shoulders back to play
A Pomeranian march. They're off!
And Sousa scares the tits away.

JAMES MICHIE

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Passing By

There's a tempting bit of greenery—of rus in urbe *scenery—*
That's haunted by the London "upper ten;"
Where, by exercise on horseback, an equestrian may force back
Little fits of tedium vitae *now and then . . .*

But I brought away one image, from that fashionable scrimmage,
Of a figure and a face—ah, such *a face!*
Love has photographed the features of that loveliest of creatures
On my memory, as Love alone can trace.

Did I hate the little dandy in the whiskers (they were sandy),
Whose absurd salute was honour'd by a smile?
Did I marvel at his rudeness in presuming on her goodness,
When she evidently loathed him all the while?

Oh, the hours that I have wasted, the regrets that I have tasted,
Since the day (it seems a century ago)
When my heart was won instanter *by a lady in a canter,*
On a certain sunny day in Rotten Row!

HENRY S. LEIGH, 1836-1883

Turkish Medley

They sat down on a bench where some Imams courteously made room for them to be seated, and there came close up to them first the little begging children, then the sleek cats seeking a friendly rub, an old man in a green turban hawking coco, "as cool as ice," a party of very pretty gipsy girls, who sold rose-water and danced—all smiling and discreet, not insistently urgent. And then they were left to themselves, to smoke in silence, and listen to the singing birds. Ladies went by all in black or wrapped in the Damascus veils which are of red or green silk with large patterns in gold; the sellers of cats' meat passed that way, and then some worthy Turk—even those in robes of silk and magnificently dignified—would gravely buy a piece for his cat, and carry it off over his shoulder, stuck on the ferrule of his umbrella . . .

An old fellow of at least a hundred was trotting babies twice round the little square for about a farthing, in a packing-case on casters, which he had made gaudy with paint, but which jolted a good deal on the old broken pavement. As a background to these thousand trivial things revealing the youthful, simple, kindly side of the people, the mosque rose up, superb in its lines and its whiteness with its two pointed shafts against the clear sky of the first of May.

PIERRE LOTI, *Disenchanted, translated by* CLARA BELL

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Toy Flotilla

. . . In the parks
The fountains scoop and flower like rockets
Over the oval ponds whose even skin
Is pocked and goosefleshed by their niggling rain
That frocks a naked core of statuary.
And at jetty's jut, roped and ripe for hire,
The yellow boats lie yielding and lolling,
Jilted and jolted like jellies . . .

W. R. RODGERS, *Stormy Day*

Primrose Path

My Father, after a little reflection, proposed to take me to Primrose Hill. I had never heard of the place, and names have always appealed directly to my imagination . . . I expected to see a mountain absolutely carpeted with primroses, a terrestrial galaxy like that which covered the hill that led up to Montgomery Castle in Donne's poem. But at length, as we walked from the Chalk Farm direction, a miserable acclivity stole into view—surrounded, even in those days, on most sides by houses, with its grass worn to the buff by millions of boots, and resembling what I mean by " the country " about as much as Poplar resembles Paradise.

We sat down on a bench at its inglorious summit, whereupon I burst into tears, and in a heart-rending whisper sobbed, " Oh! Papa, let us go home! "

EDMUND GOSSE, *Father and Son*

Nightfall

Through willow curtains the slant-shafted sun
Spotlights the scene: in the late afternoon,
A league from London's roar, the stage is set
On a sheet of pallid water. First a fleet
Of toy ducks arrow ludicrously through
A pattern of branches, reeds and mist
And then a heron in the wings unsheathes
His blazing beak from feather-coated scabbard.
At last, before the spotlight turns to red
And drops behind the half-forgotten town,
A ballerina swan appears from nowhere
And glides across the slowly darkening stage.

R. L. COOK, *St. James's Park*

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I'LL CUT YOUR THROAT AGAIN, KATHLEEN

She came in—in a headlong rush that brought her into my arms

by FREDRIC BROWN

I HEARD the footsteps coming down the hall and I was watching the door—the door that had no knob on my side of it—when it opened.

I thought I'd recognized the step, and I'd been right. It was the young, nice one, the one whose bright hair made such a brilliant contrast with his white uniform coat.

I said, "Hello, Red," and he said, "Hello, Mr. Marlin. I—I'll take you down to the office. The doctors are there now." He sounded more nervous than I felt.

"How much time have I got, Red?"

"How much— Oh, I see what you mean. They're examining a couple of others ahead of you. You've got plenty of time."

So I didn't get up off the edge of the bed. I held my hands out in front of me, backs up and the fingers rigid. They didn't tremble any more. My fingers were steady as those of a statue, and about as useful. Oh, I could move them. I could clench them into fists slowly. But for playing saxophone and clarinet they were about as good as hands of bananas.

I turned them over—and there on my wrists were the two ugly scars where, a little less than a year ago, I'd slashed them with a straight razor. Deeply enough to have cut some of the tendons that moved the fingers. I moved my fingers now, curling them inwards towards the palm, slowly. The interne was watching.

"They'll come back, Mr. Marlin," he said. "Exercise—that's all they need." It wasn't true. He knew that I knew he knew it, for when I didn't bother to answer, he went on, almost defensively, "Anyway, you can still arrange and conduct. You can hold a baton. I've got an idea for you, Mr. Marlin."

"Yes, Red?"

"Trombone. Why don't you take up trombone? You could learn it quickly, and you don't need finger action to play trombone."

Slowly I shook my head. I didn't try to explain. It was

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something you couldn't explain, anyway. It wasn't only the physical ability to play an instrument that was gone. It was more than that.

I looked at my hands once more and then I put them carefully away in my pockets, where I wouldn't have to look at them.

I looked up at the interne's face again. There was a look on it that I recognized and remembered—the look I'd seen on thousands of young faces across footlights—hero-worship. Out of the past it came to me, that look.

He could still look at me that way, even after—

"Red," I asked him, "don't you think I'm insane?"

"Of course not, Mr. Marlin. I don't think you were ever—" He stopped short on that.

I goaded him. Maybe it was cruel, but it was more cruel to me. I said, "You don't think I was ever crazy? You think I was sane when I tried to kill my wife?"

"Well—it was just temporary. You had a break-down. You'd been working too hard—twenty hours a day, about. You were near the top with your band. As for me, Mr. Marlin, *I* think you were *at* the top. You had it on all of them, only most of the public hadn't found out yet. They would have, if—"

"If I hadn't slipped up," I said. I thought, what a way to express going crazy, trying to kill your wife, trying to kill yourself, and losing your memory.

Red looked at his wrist-watch, then pulled up a chair and sat down facing me.

He talked fast. "We haven't got too long, Mr. Marlin," he said. "And I want you to pass those tests and get out of here. You'll be all right once you get out of this place. Your memory will come back, a little at a time—when you're in the right surroundings."

I shrugged. It didn't seem to matter much. I said, "O.K., brief me. It didn't work last time, but—I'll try."

"You're Johnny Marlin," he said. "*The* Johnny Marlin. You play a fine clarinet, but that's side-line. You're the best alto sax in the business, *I* think. You were fourth in the jazz poll a year ago, but—"

I interrupted him. "You mean I *did* play clarinet and sax. Not any more, Red. Can't you get that into your head?" I hadn't meant to sound so rough about it, but my voice got out of control.

Red didn't seem to hear me. His eyes went to his wrist-watch again and then came back to me. He started talking again. "We've got ten minutes, maybe. I wish I knew what you remember and what you don't about all I've been telling you

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the last month. What's your right name—I mean, before you took a professional name?"

"John Dettman," I said. "Born June 1st, 1920, on the wrong side of the tracks. Orphaned at five. Released from orphanage at sixteen. Worked in a Cleveland hotel and saved up enough money to buy a clarinet, and took lessons. Bought a saxophone a year later, and got my first job with a band at eighteen."

"What band?"

"Heinie Wills's—a local band in Cleveland, playing at Danceland there. Played third alto for a while, then first alto. Next, worked for a six-man outfit called—What was it, Red? I don't remember."

"The Basin Streeters, Mr. Marlin. Look, do you really remember any of this or is it just from what I've told you?"

"Mostly from what you've told me, Red. Sometimes, I get kind of vague pictures, but it's pretty foggy. Let's get on with it. So the Basin Streeters did a lot of travelling for a while and I left them in Chicago for my first job with a name band—Look, I think I've got that list of bands pretty well memorized. There isn't much time. Let's skip it.

"I joined the army in '42—I must have been twenty-two then. A year at Fort Billings, and then England. Invalided out by a bomb in London before I ever got round to pulling a trigger except on a rifle range. A month in a hospital there, shipped back, six months in a mental hospital here, and let out on a P.N." He knew as well as I did what P.N. meant, but I translated it for us. "Psycho-neurotic. Loony. Crazy."

He opened his mouth to argue the point, and then decided there wasn't time.

"So I'd saved my money," I said, "before and during the army, and I started my own band. That would have been—late '44?"

Red nodded. "Remember the list of places you've played, the names of your band, what I told you about them?"

"Pretty well," I said. There wouldn't be time to go into that, anyway. I said, "And early in '47, while I was still getting started, I got married. To Kathy Courteen. *The* Kathy Courteen, who owns a slice of Chicago, who's got more money than sense. She must have, if she married me. We were married June 10th, 1947. Why *did* she marry me, Red?"

"Why shouldn't she?" he said. "You're *Johnny Marlin*!"

The funny part of it is he wasn't kidding. He thought being Johnny Marlin had really been something. I looked down at my hands. They'd come out of my pockets again.

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I think I knew, suddenly, why I wanted to get out of this gilt-lined loony-bin that was costing Kathy Courteen—Kathy Marlin, I mean—the price of a fur coat every week to keep me in. It wasn't because I wanted to get *out*, really. It was because I wanted to get away from the hero-worship of this red-headed kid who had been crazy about Johnny Marlin's band, and Johnny Marlin's saxophone.

"Have you ever seen Kathy, Red?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I've seen pictures of her, newspaper pictures of her. She's beautiful."

"Even with a scar across her throat?" I asked.

His eyes avoided mine. They went to his watch again, and he stood up quickly. "We'd better get down there," he said.

He went to the knobless door, opened it with a key, and politely held it open for me to precede him out into the hallway.

That look in his eyes made me feel foolish, as always. I don't know how he did it, but Red always managed to look *up* at me, from a height a good three inches taller than mine.

Then, side by side, we went down the great stairway of that lush, plush madhouse that had once been a million-dollar mansion and was now a million-dollar sanatorium with more employees than inmates.

We went into the office, and the grey-haired nurse behind the desk nodded and said, "They're ready for you."

"Good luck, Mr. Marlin," Red said. "I'm crossing my fingers for you."

So I went through the door.

There were three of them, as last time.

"Sit down please, Mr. Marlin," Dr. Glasspiegel, the head one, said.

They sat each at one side of the square table, leaving the fourth side and the fourth chair for me. I slid into it. I put my hands in my pockets again. I knew if I looked at them or thought about them, I might say something foolish, and then I'd be here a while again.

Then they were asking me questions, taking turns at it. Some about my past—and Red's coaching had been good. Once or twice, but not often, I had to admit my memory was hazy on a point or two. And some of the questions were about the present, and they were easy. I mean, it was easy to see what answers they wanted to those questions, and to give them.

But it had been like this the last time, I remembered, over a month ago. And I'd failed somewhere. They hadn't let me go. Maybe, I thought, because they got too much money

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out of keeping me here. I didn't really think that. These men were the best in their profession.

There was a lull in the questioning. They seemed to be waiting for something. For what, I wondered, and it came to me that the last interview had been like this, too.

The door behind me opened, quietly, but I heard it. And I remembered—that had happened last time, too. Just as they told me I could go back to my room and they'd talk it over, someone else had come in. I'd passed him as I'd left the room.

And, suddenly, I knew what I'd slipped up on. It had been someone I'd been supposed to recognize, and I hadn't. And here was the same test again. Before I turned, I tried to remember what Red had told me about people I'd known—but there was so little physical description to it. It seemed hopeless.

"You may return to your room now, Mr. Marlin," Dr. Glasspiegel was saying. "We—er—wish to discuss your case."

"Thanks," I said, and stood up.

I saw that he'd taken off his horn-rimmed glasses and was tapping them nervously on the back of his hand, which lay on the table before him. I thought, O.K., so now I know the catch and next time I'll make the grade. I'll have Red get me pictures of my band and other bands I've played with and as many newspaper pictures as he can find of people I knew.

I turned. The man in the doorway, standing there as though waiting for me to leave, was short and fat. There was a tense look in his face, even though his eyes were avoiding mine. He was looking past me, at the doctors. I tried to think fast. Who did I know that was short and—

I took a chance. I'd had a trumpet-player named Tubby Hayes.

"Tubby!" I said.

And hit the bull's eye. His face lit up like a neon sign and he grinned a yard wide and stuck out his hand.

"Johnny! Johnny, it's good to see you." He was pumping my arm up and down.

"Tubby Hayes!" I said, to let them know I knew his last name, too. "Don't tell me you're crazy too. That why you're here?"

He laughed, nervously. "I came to get you, Johnny. That is—er—if—" He looked past me.

Dr. Glasspiegel was clearing his throat. He and the other doctors were standing now. "Yes," he said, "I believe it will be all right for Mr. Marlin to leave." He put his hand on my shoulder. They were all standing about me now. "Your reactions are normal, Mr. Marlin," he said. "Your memory is

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still a bit impaired but—er—it will improve gradually. More rapidly, I believe, amid familiar surroundings than here. You—er—have plans?"

"No," I said, frankly.

"Don't overwork again. Take things easy for a while. And . . ."

There was a lot more advice. And then signing things, and getting ready. It was almost an hour before we got into a taxi, Tubby and I.

He gave the address, and I recognized it. The Carleton. That was where I'd lived, that last year. Where Kathy still lived.

"How's Kathy?" I asked.

"Fine, Johnny. I guess she is. I mean—"

"You mean what?"

He looked a bit embarrassed. "Well—I mean I haven't seen her. She never liked us boys, Johnny. You know that. But she was fair to us. You know we decided we couldn't hold together without you, Johnny, and might as well break up. Well, she paid us what was due to us—the three weeks you were behind, I mean—and doubled it, a three weeks' bonus to tide us over."

"The boys doing O.K., Tubby?"

"Yep, Johnny. All of them. Well—except Harry. He kind of got lost in the snow, if you know what I mean."

"That's tough," I said, and didn't elaborate. I didn't know whether I was supposed to know that Harry had been taking cocaine or not. And there had been two Harrys with the band, at that.

So the band had split up.

In a way I was glad. If someone had taken over and held it together, maybe there'd have been an argument about trying to get me to come back.

"A month ago, Tubby," I said, "they examined me at the sanatorium and I flunked. I think it was because I didn't recognize somebody. Was it you? Were you there then?"

"You walked right by me, through the door, Johnny. You never saw me."

"You were there—for that purpose? Both times?"

"Yes, Johnny. That Doc Glasspiegel suggested it. He got to know me, and to think of me, I guess, because I dropped round so often to ask about you. Why wouldn't they let me see you?"

"Rules," I said. "That's Glasspiegel's system, part of it.

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Complete isolation during the period of cure. I haven't even seen Kathy."

"No!" said Tubby. "They told me you couldn't have visitors, but I didn't know it went that far." He sighed. "She must be head over heels in love with you, Johnny. From what I hear, she's carried the torch."

"God knows why," I said. "After I cut—"

"Shut up," Tubby said sharply. "You aren't to think or talk about that. Glasspiegel told me that while you were getting ready."

"O.K.," I said. It didn't matter. "Does Kathy know we're coming?"

"We? I'm not going in, Johnny. I'm just going to the door with you. No, she doesn't know. You asked the doc not to tell her, didn't you?"

"I didn't want a reception. I just want to walk in quietly. Sure, I asked the doctor, but I thought maybe he'd warn her anyway. So she could hide the knives."

"Now, Johnny—"

"O.K.," I said.

I looked out of the window of the taxi. I knew where we were and just how far from the Carleton. Funny my topography hadn't gone the way the rest of my memory had. I still knew the streets and their names, even though I couldn't recognize my best friend or my wife. The mind is a funny thing, I thought.

"One worry you won't have," Tubby Hayes said. "That brother of hers, Myron Courteen, the one that was always in your hair."

The red-headed interne had mentioned that Kathy had a brother. Apparently I wasn't supposed to like him.

So I said, "Did someone drop him down a well?"

"Headed west. He's a Los Angeles playboy now. Guess he finally quarrelled with Kathy and she settled an allowance on him and let him go."

We were getting close to the Carleton—only half a dozen blocks to go—and suddenly I realized there was a lot that I didn't know, and should know.

"Let's have a drink, Tubby," I said. "I—I'm not quite ready to go home yet."

"Sure, Johnny," he said, and then spoke to the driver.

We swung in to the kerb in front of a smart neon-and-chromium bar. It didn't look familiar, the way the rest of the street did. Tubby saw me looking.

"Yeah, it's new," he said. "Been here only a few months."

We went in and sat at a dimly-lighted bar. Tubby ordered

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two Scotch-and-sodas—without asking me, so I guess that's what I used to drink. I didn't remember. Anyway, it tasted all right, and I hadn't had a drink for eleven months, so even the first sip of it hit me a little.

And when I'd drunk it all, it tasted better than all right. I looked at myself in the blue mirror at the back of the bar. I thought, there's always this. I can always drink myself to death—on Kathy's money. I knew I didn't have any myself because Tubby had said I was three weeks behind with the band's pay.

We ordered a second round and I asked Tubby, "How come this Myron hasn't money of his own, if he's Kathy's brother?" He looked at me strangely. I'd been doing all right up to now. I said, "Yeah, there are things I'm still hazy about."

"Oh," he said. "Well, that one's easy. Myron is worse than a black sheep for the Courteens. He's an all-round good-for-nothing. He was disinherited, and Kathy got it all. But she takes care of him."

He took a sip of his drink and put it down again. "You know, Johnny," he said, "none of us liked Kathy much, because she was against you having the band and wanted you to herself. But we were wrong about her. She's grand. The way she sticks to her menfolk, no matter what they do. Even Myron."

"Even me," I said.

"Well—she saved your life, Johnny. With blood—" He stopped abruptly. "Forget it, Johnny."

I finished my second drink. I said, "I'll tell you the truth, Tubby. I can't forget it—because I don't remember it. But I've got to know, before I face her. What did happen that night?"

"Johnny, I—"

"Tell me," I said. "Straight."

He sighed. "O.K., Johnny. You'd been working close to twenty-four hours a day trying to put us over, and we'd tried to get you to slow down and so did Kathy."

"Cut the build-up."

"That night, after we played at the hotel, we rehearsed some new stuff. You acted funny, then, Johnny. You forgot things, and you had a headache. We made you go home early, in spite of yourself. And when you got home—well, you went off the rails, Johnny. You picked a quarrel with your wife—I don't know what you accused her of. And you went off your head. You got your razor—you always used to shave with a cut-throat—and, well, you tried to kill her. And then yourself."

"You're skipping the details," I said. "How did she save my life?"

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"Well, Johnny, you hadn't killed her as you thought. The cut went deep on one side of her throat but—she must have been pulling away—it went lightly across the centre and didn't get the jugular or anything. But there was a lot of blood and she fainted, and you thought she was dead, I guess, and slashed your own wrists. But she came to, and found you bleeding to death fast. Bleeding as she was, she got tourniquets on both your arms and held 'em and kept yelling until one of the servants woke up and got the Carleton house doctor. That's all, Johnny."

"It's enough, isn't it?" I thought a while and then I added, "Thanks, Tubby. Look, you run along and leave me. I want to think it out alone, and then I'll walk the rest of the way. O.K.?"

"O.K., Johnny," he said. "You'll ring me up soon?"

"Sure," I said. "Thanks for everything."

"You'll be all right, Johnny?"

"Sure. I'm all right."

After he left I ordered another drink. My third, and it would have to be my last, because I was really feeling them. I didn't want to go home drunk to face Kathy.

I sat there, sipping it slowly, looking at myself in that blue mirror at the back of the bar. I wasn't a bad-looking guy, in a blue mirror. Only I should be dead, instead of sitting there. I should have died that night eleven months ago. I'd tried to die.

I was almost alone at the bar. There was one couple drinking martinis at the far end of it. The girl was a blonde who looked like a chorus girl. I wondered idly if Kathy was a blonde. I hadn't thought to ask anyone. If Kathy walked in here now, I thought, I wouldn't know her.

The blonde down there picked up some change off the bar and walked over to the juke box. She put in a coin and pressed some buttons, and then swayed her hips back to the bar. The juke box started playing and it was an old record—and a good one—of the *Memphis Blues*. Blue and brassy stuff from the days before jazz went commercial.

I sat there listening, and feeling like the devil. I thought, I've got to get over it. Every time I hear stuff like that I can't go on wanting to kill myself just because I can't play any more. I'm not the only guy in the world who can't play music. And the others get along.

My hands were lying on the bar in front of me and I tried them again, while I listened, and they wouldn't work. They wouldn't ever work again. My thumbs were O.K., but the four fingers on each hand opened and closed together, as though they were webbed, and not separately.

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Maybe the Scotch was making me feel better, but—maybe, I decided—maybe it wouldn't be too bad—

Then the record ended and another slid onto the turn-table and started, and it was going to be blue, too. *Mood Indigo.* I recognized the opening bar of the introduction. I wondered idly if all the records were blues, chosen to match the blue back-bar mirrors.

Deep blue stuff, anyway, and well handled and arranged, whoever was doing it. A few Scotches and a blue mood, and that *Mood Indigo* can take hold of your insides and wring them. And this recording of it was good, pretty good. The brasses tossed it to the reeds and then the piano took it for a moment, backed by wire-brush stuff on the drums, and modulated it into a higher key and built it up and you knew something was coming.

And then something came, and it was an alto sax, a sax with a tone like blue velvet, swinging high, wide, and off the beat, and tossing in little arabesques of counterpoint so casually that it never seemed to leave the melody to do it. An alto sax riding high and riding hot, pouring notes like molten gold.

I unwound my fingers from round the Scotch-and-soda glass and got up and walked across the room to the juke box. I knew already but I looked. The record playing was Number 9, and Number 9 was *Mood Indigo*—Johnny Marlin.

For a black second I felt that I had to stop it, that I had to smash my fist through the glass and jerk the arm off the record. I had to because it was doing things to me. That sound out of the past was making me remember, and I knew suddenly that the only way I could keep on wanting to live at all was *not* to remember.

Maybe I would have smashed the glass. I don't know. But instead I saw the cord and plug where the juke box was plugged into the wall. I jerked out the cord and the box went dark and silent. Then I walked out into the dusk, with the three of them staring at me—the blonde and her escort and the bar-tender.

The bar-tender called out "Hey!" but didn't go on with it when I went on out without turning. I saw them in the mirror on the inside of the door as I opened it, a frozen tableau that slid sideways off the mirror as the door swung open.

I must have walked the six blocks to the Carleton, through the gathering twilight. I crossed the wide mahogany-panelled entrance hall to the lift. The uniformed operator looked familiar to me—more familiar than Tubby had. At least, there was an impression that I'd seen him before.

"Good evening, Mr. Marlin," he said, and didn't ask me

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what floor I wanted. But his voice sounded strange, tense, and he waited a moment, stuck his head out of the lift, and looked around before he closed the door. I got the impression that he was hoping for another passenger, that he hated to shut himself and me in that tiny closed room.

But no one else came into the entrance hall and he slid the door shut and moved the handle. The building slid downward past us and came to rest at the eleventh floor. I stepped out into another mahogany-panelled hall and the lift door slid shut behind me.

It was a short hallway, on this floor, with only four doors leading to what must be quite large suites. I knew which door was mine—or I should say Kathy's. My money never paid for a suite like that.

It wasn't Kathy who opened the door. I knew that because it was a girl wearing a maid's uniform. And she must, I thought, be new. She looked at me blankly.

"Mrs. Marlin in?" I asked.

"No, sir. She'll be back soon, sir."

I went on in. "I'll wait," I said. I followed her until she opened the door of a room that looked like a library.

"In here, please," she said. "And may I have your name?"

"Marlin," I said, as I walked past her. "Johnny Marlin."

She caught her breath a little, audibly. Then she said, "Yes, sir," and hurried away.

Her heels didn't click on the thick carpeting of the hall, but I could tell she was hurrying. Hurrying away from a homicidal maniac, back to the farthest reaches of the apartment, probably to the protective company of a cook who would keep a cleaver handy, once she heard the news that the mad master was back. And likely there'd be new servants, if any, tomorrow.

I walked up and down for a while, and then decided I wanted to go to my room. I thought, if I don't think about it I can go there. My subconscious will know the way. And it worked; I went to my room.

I sat on the edge of the bed a while, with my head in my hands, wondering why I'd come here. Then I looked around. It was a big room, panelled like the rest of the place, beautifully furnished. Little Johnny Dettman of the Cleveland slums had come a long way to have a room like that, all to himself. There was a radiogram across the room from me, and a big cabinet of record-albums. Most of the pictures on the walls were framed photographs of bands. In a silver frame on the dressing-table was the picture of a woman.

That would be Kathy, of course. I crossed over and looked

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at it. She was beautiful, all right, a big-eyed brunette with pouting, kissable lips. And the fog was getting thinner. I almost knew and remembered her.

I looked a long time at that photograph, and then I put it down and went to the wardrobe door. I opened it and there were a lot of suits in that closet, and a lot of pairs of shoes and a choice of hats. I remembered; John Dettman had worn a sweater to high school one year because he didn't have a suit coat.

But there was something missing in that wardrobe. The instrument cases. On the floor, there at the right, should have been two combination cases for saxophone and clarinet. Inside them should have been two gold-plated alto saxes and two sleek black clarinets. At the back should have been a bigger case that held a baritone sax I sometimes fooled around with at home.

They were all gone, and I was grateful to Kathy for that. She must have understood how it would make me feel to have them around.

I closed the door gently and opened the door next to it, the bathroom. I went in and stood looking at myself in the mirror over the wash bowl. It wasn't a blue mirror. I studied my face, and it was an ordinary face. There wasn't any reason in that mirror why anyone should love me the way my wife must. I wasn't tall and I wasn't handsome. I was just a chap who had played a lot of music—once.

The mirror was the door of a built-in medicine cabinet sunk into the tile wall and I opened it. Yes, all my toilet stuff was neatly laid out on the shelves of the cabinet, as though I'd never been away, or as though I'd been expected back daily. Even—and I almost took a step backwards—both of my straight razors—the kind of a razor a barber uses—lay there on the bottom shelf beside the shaving mug and brush.

Was Kathy crazy to leave them there, after what I'd used such a thing for? Had it even been one of these very razors? I could, of course, have had three of them, but—No, I remembered, there were only two, a matched pair.

In the sanatorium I'd used an electric razor, naturally. All of them there did, even ones there for less deadly reasons than mine. And I was going to keep on using one. I'd take these and drop them down the incinerator, right now. If my wife was foolhardy enough to leave those things in a madman's room, I wasn't. How could I be sure I'd never go off the beam again?

My hand shook a little as I picked them up and closed the mirrored door. I'd take them right now and get rid of them. I went out of the bathroom and was crossing my own room, out

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in the middle of it, when there was a soft tap on the door—the connecting door from Kathy's room. "Johnny—" her voice said.

I thrust the razors out of sight into my coat-pocket, and answered—I don't remember exactly what. My heart seemed to be in my throat, blocking my voice. And the door opened and Kathy came in—came in like the wind in a headlong rush that brought her into my arms. And with her face buried in my shoulder.

"Johnny, Johnny," she was saying, "I'm so glad you're back."

Then we kissed, and it lasted a long time, that kiss. But it didn't do anything to me. If I'd been in love with Kathy once, I'd have to start all over again, now. Oh, it was nice kissing her, as it would be nice kissing any beautiful woman. It wouldn't be hard to fall in love again. But so much easier and better, I thought, if I could push away all of the fog, if I could remember.

"I'm glad to be back, Kathy," I said.

Her arms tightened about me, almost convulsively. There was a big armchair next to the radiogram. I picked her up bodily, since she didn't want to let go of me, and crossed to the chair. I sat in it with her on my lap. After a minute she straightened up and her eyes met mine, questioningly.

The question was, "Do you love me, Johnny?"

But I couldn't meet it just then. I'd pretend, of course, when I got my bearings, and after a while my memory would come the rest of the way back—or I'd manage to love her again, instead. But just then, I dodged the question and her eyes.

Instead, I looked at her throat and saw the scar. It wasn't as bad as I'd feared. It was a thin, long line that wouldn't have been visible much over a yard away.

"Plastic surgery, Johnny," she said. "It can do wonders. Another year and it won't show at all. It—it doesn't matter." Then, as though to forestall my saying anything more about it, she said quickly, "I gave away your saxophones, Johnny. I—I figured you wouldn't want them around. The doctors say you'll never be able to—to play again."

I nodded. I said, "I guess it's best not to have them around."

"It's going to be so wonderful, Johnny. Maybe you'll hate me for saying it, but I'm—almost—glad. You know that was what came between us, your band and your playing. And it won't now, will it? You won't want to try another band—just directing and not playing—or anything foolish like that, will you, Johnny?"

"No, Kathy," I said.

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Nothing, I thought, would mean anything without playing. I'd been trying to forget that. I closed my eyes and tried, for a moment, not to think.

"It'll be so wonderful, Johnny. You can do all the things I wanted you to do, and that you wouldn't. We can travel, spend our winters in Florida, and entertain. We can live on the Riviera part of the time, and we can ski in the Tyrol and gamble at Monte Carlo and—and everything I've always wanted to do, Johnny."

"It's nice to have a few million," I said.

She pulled back a little and looked at me. "Johnny, you're not going to start *that* again, are you? Oh, Johnny, you can't—now."

No, I thought, I can't. Heaven knows why she wants him to be one, but little Johnny Dettman is a kept man, now, a rich girl's darling. He can't make money now the only way he knows how. He couldn't even dig ditches. But he'll learn to balance teacups on his knee and smile at dowagers. He'll have to. It was coming back to me now, that endless argument.

But the argument was over now. There wasn't any longer anything to argue about.

"Kiss me, Johnny," Kathy said, and when I had, she said, "Let's have some music, huh? And maybe a dance—you haven't forgotten how to dance, have you, Johnny?"

She jumped up from my lap and went to the record-album cabinet.

"Some of mine, will you, Kathy?" I asked. I thought, I might as well get used to it now, all at once. So I won't feel again, ever, as I had when I'd almost put my fist through that juke-box window.

"Of course, Johnny."

She took them from one of the albums, half a dozen of them, and put them on the radiogram. The first one started, and it was a silly gay tune we'd once recorded—"*Chickery chick, cha la, cha la . . .*" And she came back, holding out her hands to me to get up and dance, and I did, and I still knew how to dance.

And we danced over to the french doors that led to the balcony and opened them, and out onto the marble floor of the little railed balcony, into the cool darkness of the evening, with a full moon riding high in the sky overhead.

Chickery chick—a nice tune, if a silly tune. No vocal, of course—we'd never gone in for them—but smooth rhythm, with a beat. And a high-riding alto sax, smooth as silk.

And I was remembering the argument. It had been one, a vicious one. Musician versus playboy as my career. I was

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remembering *Kathy* now, and suddenly tried not to. Maybe it would be better to forget all that bitterness, the quarrelling and the overwork and everything that led up to the blankness of the break-down.

But our feet moved smoothly on the marble. Kathy danced well. And the record ended.

"It's going to be wonderful, Johnny," she whispered, "having you all to myself . . . You're *mine* now, Johnny."

"Yes," I said. I thought, I've *got* to be.

The second record started, and was a contrast. A number as blue as *Mood Indigo*, and stronger. *St. James Infirmary*, as recorded by Johnny Marlin and his orchestra. And I remembered the hot day in the studio when we'd recorded it. Again no vocal, but as we started dancing again, the words ran through my mind with the liquid gold of the alto sax I'd once played.

I went down to St. James Infirmary . . . Saw my baby there . . . Stretched on a long white table . . . So sweet, so cold, so—

I jerked away from her, ran inside and switched off the radiogram. I caught sight of my face in the mirror as I passed. It was white as a corpse's face. I went back to the balcony. Kathy still stood there—she hadn't moved.

"Johnny, what—?"

"That tune," I said. "Those words. I *remember*, Kathy. I remember that night. *I didn't do it.*"

I felt weak. I leaned back against the wall behind me. Kathy came closer.

"Johnny—what do you mean?"

"I remember," I said. "I walked in, and you were lying there—with blood all over your throat and your dress—*when I came into the room.* I *don't* remember after that—but that's what must have knocked me off my base, after everything else. That's when I went crazy, not before."

"Johnny—you're wrong—"

The weakness was gone now. I stood straighter.

"Your brother," I said. "He hated you because you ran his life, like you wanted to run mine, because you had the money he thought should be his, and you doled it out to him and *ran* him. Sure, he hated you. I remember him now. Kathy, I remember. That was about the time he got past liquor and was playing with dope. Heroin, wasn't it? And that night he must have come in, sky-high and murderous, before I did. And tried to kill you, and must have thought he did, and ran. It must have been just before I came in."

"Johnny, please—you're wrong—"

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"You came to, after I keeled over," I said. "It—it sounds incredible, Kathy, but it had to be that way. And, Kathy, that cold mind of yours saw a way to get everything it wanted. To protect your brother, and to get me, the way you wanted me. It was perfect, Kathy. Fix me so I'd never play again, and at the same time put me in a spot where I'd be tied to you for ever because I'd think I tried to kill you."

I said, "You get your way, don't you, Kathy? At any cost. But you didn't want me to die. I'll bet you had those tourniquets ready *before you slashed my wrists.*"

She stood there, tall and straight, and she came the step between us and put her soft arms around me.

"I don't see, though," I said, "how you could have known I wouldn't remember what really—Wait, I can see how you thought that. I had a drink or two on the way home. You smelt the liquor on me and thought I'd come home drunk, dead drunk. And I always had a black-out when I got drunk. That night I wasn't drunk but the shock and the break-down did even more to me. Damn you, Kathy."

"But, Johnny, don't I win?" She was beautiful, smiling, leaning back to look up into my face. Yes, she'd won. *So sweet, so cold, so bare.* So bare her throat that in the moonlight I could see the faint scar, the dotted line.

And one of my crippled hands, in my pocket, fumbled open one of the razors, brought it out of my pocket, and up and across.

★ ★ ★

. . . *THOSE UNHEARD ARE SWEETER*

Later on, Father took us to hear Patti sing at the Albert Hall several times, applauding her to the skies. Then sighing gently, he would say—"Beautiful, but nothing to Jenny Lind." He told us that often, as a young man fighting his way in London, he had gone without his dinner, in order to buy a ticket to hear Jenny Lind at Covent Garden. When she became his patient in after years, she was very touched about those dinners, and told him she had only met two completely honest men in her life. One was Dean Stanley, who after she had charmed his drawing-room company with "Angels Ever Bright and Fair," remarked—"Such beautiful words—if you would only say them without the notes." The other was her own son, who, as a small boy, broke in on her practising with—"Mother, do stop that screaming!"

DOROTHY MCCALL, *When That I Was.*

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SACRED DRUM OF ITAMPO

Gripping the treasure in his teeth he climbed stealthily into the boughs

by E. C. ANSTEY

"WHAT news?" the District Commissioner asked briefly, handing his visitor the inevitable gin and bitters and pushing cigarettes towards him.

"Timbela Moshi has lost his football."

Tryvor did not smile. He was in a serious mood, and, sipping his drink, he put it down and grunted. Pinching Jones looked at him sharply.

"What is it?" he asked.

The civilian threw his hands up and shrugged his shoulders. The sturdy, broad-shouldered figure of the older man, unusually full-blooded for the coast, contrasted sharply with the wiry slimness of the young soldier, clean-shaven and colourless.

"I don't know. That's the trouble. I don't know. But there is something wrong. It's in the air—vague—impalpable—disturbing. You Intelligence people ought to sense these things. Don't you feel it now?"

Pinching Jones, known universally as the Weasel, suddenly recalled the queer fear in Timbela's eyes when he had been probing the incident of the football, the great treasure of the child's heart, and his unusual silence about a loss which must have shaken him to the bottom of his small soul. He remembered noticing a certain stir in the market-place a few days before; and . . . yes . . . perhaps there was an uneasy touch in the atmosphere.

When the servants had left the room at the end of dinner Tryvor said abruptly: "It is said that the drum has been heard."

The Weasel started. "The drum?"

"Yes. *The* drum—the sacred drum of Itampo."

"Where?"

"I wish I knew. No one will say. You know how jealously it is hidden. Not that we want the darned thing unless it again becomes a focus of rebellion.

"You didn't know Arthur Ringrose—my predecessor, did you? He was convinced that it is within a five-mile circle of

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here. 'Fulassi is the traditional capital and seat of the Kings,' he used to say, 'and will be the centre of rebellion if it ever comes.' The drum must have an escort at all times of not less than a hundred men. That is why it cannot be in one of the surrounding villages or we should know, and why it cannot be hidden in a tree. Accommodation for a hundred men means a village. But we know all the villages."

"Do we?"

The Commissioner looked up quickly. Pinching Jones went on, "Something comes back to me now. Wasn't Salambi the hereditary Keeper of the Drum? Where is he?"

"Gone on a visit to the Coast with all his family, I believe."

"One of his young sons, Bosumchi, was a great pal of Timbela's. I asked Timbela one day what had happened to him and the little devil began twitching his toes. It is a trick I can't cure him of. Whenever he has anything to hide he twitches his toes. A nice sort of intelligence agent he will make, as I always tell him."

Tryvor chuckled. "I wonder he hasn't got St. Vitus' Dance in his toes. Of all the young devils in this benighted country! What is this about his football?"

The Weasel was silent for a little. A queer thought struck him on remembering the appearance, as he had dressed for dinner that evening, of the little figure in the door of his room naked except for his loin-cloth, with tears rolling down his cheeks at the loss of his treasure.

"The football?" he repeated at last. "Yes, Tryvor, there is something queer about that football. Timbela worshipped it. The servants say he took it out to play and came back without it. If any local boy had robbed him, Timbela would have had all the police behind him to recover it. They know he is in my service. But he won't speak. He is scared stiff. I had no time to bother about it this evening, but I'll look into it tomorrow."

Tryvor nodded slowly.

"You're right, Weasel. It *is* queer. But about Bosumchi—I should like to know very much where Salambi's family is. I am certain trouble is in the wind but I can't prove it. I am having the malcontents watched—Kwambi Jinna and his crowd. If they disappear in the next twenty-four hours, that will settle it. I shall insist on telling the Governor."

The Weasel whistled. "Crikey! John Ambrose will fuse and you'll be done if there is nothing in it."

Tryvor smiled grimly. "Yes. I know that. However, we shall see what your Moshi boy says. The Chief won't listen to me. The Governor is coming next week and the Chief's basic

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article of faith is that everything in the garden is lovely. When I suggested that H.E.'s visit should be postponed, he showed all the signs of apoplexy. Stretch your ears in every direction and tell me whether you gather in anything whatever to confirm my fears."

Jones nodded.

If proof could be adduced in time, was committed to writing, and was ignored by the Chief, would not Nemesis overtake the pompous egotism and conceited self-sufficiency of that unpopular representative of the Crown, Mr. Trenderly Bampkin, Chief Commissioner of the Reserved Territories? In which case the sun would shine brighter through the gloomy forests of Fulassi.

The Weasel's inquiries on the following morning were fruitless. They met a blank wall of protesting ignorance. He made no direct inquiries of Timbela Moshi for he did not wish to put the boy on his guard. But he took him to a corner of the golf course on the edge of the forest where he knew that the wooden back of a long hut had served Timbela as a wall against which to practise with his football. Reports of the boy's movements on the previous day had indicated this spot as his probable destination.

When they reached the place he swung on his heel and looked straight at Timbela. "Who stole your football from you, Timbela Moshi, in this place? Tell me and I shall recover it."

The boy's startled look faded swiftly into stubbornness. On an impulse of the moment the Weasel tried a shot in the dark. "It was Bosumchi who stole the ball as I well know. Tell me about it."

Timbela's amazement confirmed the guess. He gasped, looking round fearfully.

"Lord! Lord!" he whimpered. "I did not tell you. You will say I did not tell you?"

The Weasel's heart missed a beat. Was not this one of the facts Tryvor was demanding—the secret presence in the neighbourhood of a member of the Salambi family? That might well be a matter of life and death if the guardianship of the Sacred Drum was in question.

"You were practising against this wall," he began confidently, seating himself on a log, "as I have taught you, when Bosumchi, the son of Salambi, appeared—from where?"

Timbela turned his frightened eyes towards a clump of plantains near by, without speaking.

The Weasel nodded "From those trees yonder. Perhaps he played with you for a time." He scanned the clump closely.

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There was no sign of a path. A boy could have wriggled through the undergrowth slowly. He could not have escaped quickly that way.

"Then," he continued, watching the effect of his words, "he found the game so much to his liking that he snatched the ball like a common thief and ran, to continue the play at his home."

Timbela nodded almost imperceptibly, fidgeting nervously with his loin-cloth, the only covering he wore. "His home," Jones went on, "where you could not follow—away in the bush. But not this way—there is no path. He ran along the edge of the forest until he came to a path—this way or that way?"

The boy's eyes strayed up the hill to the left. "Good. We shall go that way, over this little hill to the Buna Road . . ."

Timbela shrank away, crying pitifully. "No, Lord, no. We shall be seen. They will say I led you. No. No. Let me go. Let me go!"

The Weasel stopped. If his suspicions were true, there would be real danger in forcing Timbela to go on in his company. From the ridge below which they stood, an orderly could be seen running in their direction.

"Do not fear, Timbela," said his master quickly. "I leave you. See if you can find where your football is. And listen! If you find it and tell me, I shall give you the belt with the hunting knife."

Timbela Moshi looked after his master, fear chased from his mercurial mind by the thrill of such an amazing possibility. The belt with the knife! Drawing the loin-cloth from his waist, he wound it round his head out of the way. Naked from the head downwards, he trotted off towards the Buna road.

The atmosphere in the big living-room at the Fort was electric; the Chief Commissioner fidgeting and indignant; Tryvor motionless and tight-lipped; Colonel Carter, commanding the troops in the Territory, watchful and somewhat amused. He broke in before the irate Chief could speak. No browbeating of one of his officers by a blinking civilian for him.

"Morning, Pinching Jones. The Chief wants to know whether we have had any signs of unrest. I have said none has been reported to me. Right?"

The Weasel felt the Chief Commissioner's eyes fixed on him. "Yes, sir. It is true I have reported no signs of unrest to you. But this morning I have an indication that may mean that Salambi and his family are hiding in the neighbourhood. If this is true, it may be serious. As you know, sir, Salambi is the hereditary Keeper of the Sacred Drum."

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The Chief snorted angrily.

"What indications? Have you seen them? If not, who has?"

"One of Salambi's young sons has been seen. I am making further inquiries."

Mr. Bampkin laughed contemptuously. "One of Salambi's sons has been seen! How very alarming! Anything else?"

"Nothing definite, sir. Only vague feelings of some uneasiness . . . or expectancy . . . as though people were waiting for something to happen."

The Chief exploded. "My God, this is too much! You'll be telling me you have a sixth sense next. Now, look here, this has got to stop. Fulassi has never been more quiet or contented or prosperous, with money pouring in for their cocoa, houses going up, motor cars being bought—"

A native clerk entered from the verandah and advanced deferentially towards the Chief Commissioner. "Forgive intrusion, sir. A telegram from His Excellency."

The Chief snatched the form and scanned it. "Very good, Mr. Quaggo. Acknowledge receipt and notify compliance. Gentlemen, listen to this. 'Arrive tomorrow 3rd 3.30 p.m. Arrange visit Buna Waterworks 4th without fail. Rest of programme at your discretion.' That settles it. I will not have the Governor disturbed by old wives' tales. We shall start for Buna at 10 a.m. on the 4th. A courtesy escort, I think, Carter?"

"Very good, sir. But, as usual, the troops will meet H.E. on the town limits as he comes back—just beyond the fallen tree."

The Chief grunted. He could scarcely grudge the Governor the observance of a custom on which he invariably insisted for himself.

"H.E. hates a crowd," Bampkin continued, glancing at Tryvor out of the corner of his eye. "We must cut it down. You need not come to Buna, Tryvor. I shall show him the Waterworks."

The silence that followed was tense. To forbid the presence of a Commissioner in his own District was equivalent to a vote of non-confidence in a government. Tryvor turned white and walked out of the room.

Dismissed by a nod from the Colonel, Pinching Jones hurried after him.

There was no sign of Timbela that day or the next morning. He was often absent on his lawful and unlawful occasions. But he had never been known to miss such a ceremony as the Governor's arrival. Processions and ritual were the joys of his heart.

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By the evening of the 3rd the Weasel was alarmed. "Nothing but force would have kept the little devil away," he assured Tryvor. "What the deuce can one do? We can't sweep the forest. What about Kwambi Jinna?"

"Disappeared. Last night. I told H.E. in the Chief's presence. He looked a bit shaken. The Chief controlled himself miraculously. He merely called me a nervous old woman, overdue for leave, and broken in health. But his veins nearly popped and he was the colour of a beetroot. H.E. bowed to his superior knowledge of the native. Heaven help us! What does your Colonel say?"

"The old man is taking no risks and is going out in fighting trim."

"Thank God for that," said Tryvor.

Timbela Moshi, thrilled by the thought of the promised belt and knife, had trotted off to the Buna road confidently enough. But as the winding path, dignified in West African fashion by the title of road, plunged into the massive forest, his heart began to fail him. Bosumchi's terrific descriptions of what happened to those who pried into matters that did not concern them or who prattled of what they had seen recurred to him. The shadowed depths beneath the trees were filled with a sinister gloom. He sat down and tried to combat his fears.

Frightened by the solitude, he welcomed the appearance of some carriers approaching from the direction of Fulassi. They stopped and the leader gave the traveller's salute.

"Ho, Moshi!" he said, glancing at Timbela's tribal marks. "Whither goest thou?" He and his companions lowered their loads and squatted down facing the boy.

"To the Waterworks. There is a White Man's message to deliver."

The man nodded. "We go to the farms beyond the river."

Timbela's eyes narrowed. Fulassis, secretive by nature, do not volunteer information about their movements to boys met on the road.

"It is an easy journey," he said carelessly.

"The loads are heavy. The foolish exhaust their strength." The man paused, eyeing Timbela with covert disapproval. "Your message, it was urgent?"

The boy shrugged his shoulders. He was intrigued. What was the stranger driving at?

The leader continued in a careless tone. "A white man was preparing to follow as we started. He may be near. Perchance you await him? Or does it not matter if he finds you . . ."

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But Timbela was not listening. He was staring at the trunk of a great fallen cotton tree which, lying across the path, forced him to make a diversion round its roots.

Recovering himself, he rose unconcernedly, winding his cloth afresh round his head. "If a white man comes, I go." He nodded a farewell and trotted off round the tree-trunk, with a quick glance as he passed at a clean-cut pattern, outlined in dry mud on the white bark, of the lacing and seams of a football.

His head was buzzing. Firstly, Bosumchi had passed that way and had driven the ball, wet and muddy, against the tree hard enough to imprint its mark. Secondly, these men had been embarrassed at his presence and had wished him to go on ahead. Thirdly, it was possible that their haste was connected with a desire to avoid the white man who, they said, was following. If so, why did they not push on and leave him, Timbela, behind? Here was food for thought.

Slipping behind a tree and wriggling into the bushes, he settled down to ponder over the matter within sight of the great fallen giant of the forest. A few minutes later he saw the men he had left clamber onto the trunk, move swiftly along it, and vanish into the shadow behind a curtain of matted foliage.

Timbela stared. As an expert in the art of slinking into the forest and burrowing his way where no grown man could follow, he felt crestfallen to think that he had never used a fallen tree for the purpose. He remained on the watch waiting for the men to reappear before he investigated the trunk.

When they had not returned at the end of five minutes, he began to rearrange his ideas and recalled that they had carried their loads with them. He should have known at once that it was no temporary excursion. The deduction smote him like a blow—it was a route, leading to the object of their journey—but a secret route. How often had he passed by and glanced unconcernedly at the curtain of foliage falling over the roots of the fallen giant without a suspicion of anything unusual?

Something was nagging at his childish memory—some taunting words of Bosumchi about Timbela's blindness in seeking Bosumchi's home. "Thou hast stood on the threshold," he had jeered, "and not known it." Was this where Bosumchi had vanished with his football?

One of Timbela's guiding principles was never to do the obvious. He did not climb on the tree-trunk and follow the vanished travellers. What hidden eyes were watching through the leafy curtain? He strolled round the next corner, dived into the undergrowth and worked his way back to the fallen tree.

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In such fashion did Timbela Moshi come upon the secret entrance to the hidden village of Itampo.

The next thirty-six hours remained for long a nightmare in the boy's memory—and it did not lose in the telling. Wild pineapples and plantains provided food, and streams were plentiful. Wriggling a mile through the thick undergrowth to the fringe of the village was slow and painful, but a naked boy could worm his way where a grown man had to cut a path. He was safe enough from discovery, therefore, so long as he remained in the cover of the bush, and the hollow fork of a tree sheltered him at nights.

That he persevered for so long was to his credit and was, perhaps, due to a sight of the precious football being dribbled clumsily up the village street by Bosumchi at the very moment when he caught his first view of the huts. From then on he clung tenaciously to his determination to remain where he was until chance should bring the treasure within his reach.

That chance occurred when Salambi, hearing of the departure of the Governor from Fulassi for the Buna Waterworks, summoned his followers to action. Bosumchi, miss-kicking, had landed the ball on the edge of the undergrowth. The urgent call of the priests to the boy who, as the hereditary Keeper's son, had an important role to fill, prevented its immediate recovery. Timbela, marking it down, retrieved it and hastened along the burrowed ways, with which he was now familiar, towards the Buna road.

When he saw the fighting men gathering with their guns, stripped for battle, he thought they meant to raid some passing traders; for he knew nothing of the Governor's arrival. The affair would soon be over, he thought, leaving him free to escape to Fulassi.

He had reached the neighbourhood of the fallen tree and was cautiously skirting an open rocky outcrop onto which a path from the village debouched when he became aware of a party approaching along it. There was no time to regain the cover of the forest. Seizing a hanging creeper and gripping the lace of his football in his teeth, he clambered into the boughs of the tree above him.

The sight of the newcomers and of their burden made Timbela gasp. A party of priests were carrying on a stretcher a huge oval-shaped drum hung with gaudy rags, feathers dyed in blood, and human bones. Without doubt, it was the ill-famed Sacred Drum of Itampo. In front strode an enormous negro, his body splashed with colour and smeared with ashes, brandishing a

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grisly drumstick of a man's skull fixed to a human thigh-bone, while behind walked Bosumchi carrying some covered object under his arm.

Timbela was almost petrified with terror. A higher branch would be safer and the other side of the tree safer still. But looking upwards, he saw that he must climb vertically for at least three branches before he could move towards the trunk.

"Set the Voice of the Gods here," said the leading priest in a low tone, pointing to a flat slab of rock immediately beneath the crouching boy.

The Voice of the Gods was lowered reverently. Its surface, on closer inspection, unpleasantly resembled stretched human skin. Timbela shivered and began cautiously, inch by inch, to clamber higher into the tree.

"Oh Bosumchi," continued the priest, "son of Salambi, take the Sacred Rattle and join thy father yonder. He will give thee the order when the moment has come."

The priest turned to the drummer. "When the rattle sounds, strike once, loud and strong, and then twice more. Thus will the God himself repeat the order and make success certain."

Timbela, having reached a branch nearly thirty feet from the ground, paused for breath, jammed the ball in the fork beside him, and looked round. The foliage hampered his view but fifty yards away he could see Salambi standing on the fallen tree from which he commanded a stretch of the Buna road in each direction. Near by, he detected men lying hidden within a few yards of the road. It was obvious that they were laying an ambush, although he could not understand how the secret of the village and the safety of the drum could be risked for some paltry deed of highway robbery. It was clear to him, however, that if he could gain one more branch he would be reasonably safe, and then as soon as the affair was over, he would trot comfortably home.

What a tale he would have to tell his Lord, and what credit would they not gain! The belt and knife were as good as his. He hugged the thought as he gripped the lace of the treasured football in his teeth and stood up stealthily to climb higher into the boughs.

Below him, Salambi was standing in a tense half-crouching attitude gazing towards Buna and watching the Governor and Chief Commissioner climbing into their hammocks to be carried across the stream while the escort splashed through the ford.

Behind him, at the end of the long stretch of path leading towards Fulassi, unseen by Salambi, a machine-gun had slipped into action ready to cover the scouts leading the troops who were to meet the Governor.

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Salambi, his eyes fixed on his prey, was calculating that in four minutes' time the Big White Chief would be in the centre of the trap and the leading soldiers of the escort would be within a few yards of him. Then would he give the signal. Things promised well; the prize was almost in his hand; good timing, and all would be over while a man could count fifty.

As Timbela, with his eyes on Salambi, reached upwards to continue his climb, there was a warning crack, and the rotting branch he had unwisely gripped came away in his hand. Losing his balance, he fell across the bough he had been standing on, and under the jar, relaxed the grip of his teeth on the lacing of his treasure. The football, falling clear of the branches, landed fairly on the drum, bounced twice, struck the edge, and rebounded into the bushes beside the path.

The roar of the drum, booming through the trees, was followed by the crash of firearms in a wild volley which swept the path at man's height, and by the cries of the warriors as they burst from their hiding-places into the empty trap. From the direction of Fulassi in quick reply to the volley came the staccato rat-tat of the machine gun. Salambi jerked himself upright. He bent at the knees and slumped suddenly to the ground.

Timbela, slipping from the branch on which he lay, grasped wildly at a festoon of the great creepers which hung from tree to tree and swung like a monkey towards the path. There the troops found him, lying beside Salambi, breathless, shaken, frightened, and triumphant.

When Timbela realized what had happened, he rose with unprincipled magnificence to the occasion and his tale held his audience spellbound. The Weasel, translating the boy's Hausa to the Governor, who had insisted on accompanying the troops as they seized the village, and to the officers assembled round him, became more and more suspicious as the story of the boy's foresight and subtlety wound to its close.

When he asserted that to save the Great White Chief he had risked his life by deliberately throwing the ball onto the drum to give the signal prematurely, the Weasel hesitated. "Threw, or dropped by accident?" he queried.

Timbela's toes began to wriggle.

"Never mind," said his master hastily. "We shall speak of it later." And he translated Timbela's words glibly.

"Amazing!" the Governor commented enthusiastically. "The lad's a hero! We must see what can be done for him. Bampkin! Bampkin! Where is the Chief Commissioner?"

"Mr. Bampkin asked to be excused," said a subaltern. "He

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has had a slight sunstroke and has returned to the Fort in his hammock."

"Wise. Very wise," said the Governor, nodding his head.

"Tryvor, I leave it to you to make proposals. School, perhaps—on the coast—to begin with—and then College. A most remarkable lad!"

Tryvor smiled across at the Weasel as the same thought occurred to both. They were sorry for the school that had Timbela Moshi thrust upon it.

The boy looked inquiringly at his master.

"The Big White Chief says you are very good," he explained kindly.

He suppressed His Excellency's suggestion for Timbela's future or the glory of Timbela's day would have departed.

Timbela brushed aside the Governor's opinion as a matter of small importance. "And my Lord?" he asked anxiously.

"I am pleased with you," the Weasel said gravely. "The belt with the knife is yours. And your wage is raised by threepence."

The only concession Timbela made to the presence of His Excellency was that he did not burst into his paean of joy until he had left it.

★ ★ ★

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD

PRIZE-WINNERS OF CROSSWORD NO. 6

We are pleased to announce the three winners of Argosy's sixth Prize Crossword Competition :—

Mrs. M. A. Hitchins, Trevarrick Road, St. Austell, Cornwall.
Frank Scott Esq., Chesham Road, Wilmslow, Manchester.
George Wedge Esq., The Manse, Ulceby, Lincs.

These readers, who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Peerless.* 5, *Auburn.* 10, *Plunger.* 11, *William.* 12, *Sotto voce.* 13, *Ether.* 14, *Thorny.* 15, *Beatific.* 18, *Assuring.* 20, *Choral.* 23, *Nylon.* 25, *Alchemist.* 27, *Allowed.* 28, *Lotions.* 29, *Dry eye.* 30, *Proposes.*

Down. 1, *Pepys.* 2, *Eruptions.* 3, *Leghorn.* 4, *Sorrow.* 6, *Ugliest.* 7, *Uriah.* 8, *Numerical.* 9, *Sweeper.* 14, *Train-band.* 16, *Fire-irons.* 17, *Onwards.* 19, *Runaway.* 21, *Heel-tap.* 22, *Ocular.* 24, *Lully.* 26, *Tests.*

PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 9

For rules of entry, please see page 143.

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HAPPY PAIR

There is no such cosy combination as man and wife

MENANDER, 342-291 B.C.

From the Press, one in the morning

Dear Prue: I am very sleepy and tired, but could not think of closing my eyes till I had told you I am, dearest creature,

Your most affectionate and faithful husband,

RICHARD STEELE

30th September, 1710

One in a Million

O merry may the maid be
Who marries wi' the miller,
For foul day or fair day
He's aye bringing till her,
Has aye a penny in his pouch,
Has something hot for supper,
Wi' beef and pease, and melting cheese
And lumps o' yellow butter.

In winter-time, when wind and sleet,
Shake ha', house, barn and byre,
He sits aside a clean hearth stane,
Before a rousing fire;
O'er foaming ale he tells his tale
And aye to show he's happy
He claps his weans, and dawtes his wife
Wi' kisses warm and sappy.

SIR JOHN CLERK *of Penicuik*

Love Unspoken

A heartless woman he called her; she never told him that she loved him. But it was not so—it was not so. It was only that she never could say what she felt. Was there no crumb on his coat? Nothing she could do for him? Getting up she stood at the window with the reddish-brown stocking in her hands, partly to turn away from him, partly because she did not mind looking now, with him watching, at the Lighthouse. For she knew that he had turned his head as she turned; he was watching her. She knew that he was thinking, You are more beautiful than

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ever. And she felt herself very beautiful. Will you not tell me just for once that you love me? He was thinking that, for he was roused, what with Minta and his book, and its being the end of the day and their having quarrelled about going to the Lighthouse. But she could not do it; she could not say it. Then, knowing that he was watching her, instead of saying any thing she turned, holding her stocking, and looked at him. And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him.

VIRGINIA WOOLF, *To the Lighthouse*

Judicial Separation

When we were a soft amoeba, in ages past and gone,
Ere you were Queen of Sheba, or I King Solomon,
Alone and undivided, we lived a life of sloth,
Whatever you did, I did; one dinner served for both.
Anon came separation, by fission and divorce,
A lonely pseudopodium I wandered on my course.

SIR ARTHUR SHIPLEY, *Life*

Adam and Eve

At the end of the little garden in Hercules Buildings there was a summer-house. Mr. Butts calling one day found Mr. and Mrs. Blake sitting in this summer-house, freed from "those troublesome disguises" which have prevailed since the Fall.

"Come in," cried Blake. "It's only Adam and Eve, you know!" Husband and wife had been reciting passages from *Paradise Lost*, in character, and the garden of Hercules Buildings had to represent the garden of Eden. This incident illustrates forcibly the strength of her husband's influence over her . . . when assured by him that she (for the time) was Eve, she would not dream of contradiction—nay, she in a sense believed it.

A. GILCHRIST, *Life of William Blake*, 1863

Paragon

And yet thou art the nobler of us two:
What dare I dream of that thou canst not do?

ROBERT BROWNING, *Any Wife to Any Husband*

Last Word

Dear Prue: Sober or not, I am ever yours,

RICHARD STEELE

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★ SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE

VALENTINE FOR BETSY

I'd always dreamt of something glamorous and unusual happening

by HARRIET FRANK, Jr.

RUTHIE said she knew something like this would happen to me. She says there's something dark and Celtic in my ancestry, even though she knows that my family is Pennsylvania Dutch. Now she says she felt it in her bones. She says there was a kind of sulphurous smell in our flat, but I'm sure it was only the stuff I used to mop the bathroom with.

Ruthie thinks because I'm a lab technician for the Severn Research Foundation that I'm a cross between Robert Oppenheimer and Albert Einstein. But even if I were I couldn't come up with an answer, because nothing like this has ever happened outside of a Walpurgis-Night, especially to a girl like me.

It started on Valentine's Day. There was some chocolate cake left over from the night before and I made myself some cocoa. It was a lovely, unwholesome breakfast. There's something about cocoa and snow and smoke from chimneys that makes me feel Charles Dickensy and romantic. I called up Arnold, my fiancé and recited "Roses are red, Violets are blue" at him, but he was sleepy and, being a psychiatrist, thought it was a maladjusted child he'd been treating. When he finally realized it was me he wanted to know if anything was wrong.

"No," I said. "I'm just feeling festive."

"Fine." And then, with more of a lilt, he said, "That's fine." There was a pause and then he coughed and cleared his throat. "Valentine's Day . . . There's a romantic significance, isn't there?"

"Usually," I said.

"You'll be hearing from me," he said mysteriously, and hung up. I *would* have liked him to murmur a few things, but it was 7 a.m. Besides, Arnold says the sensual graph is periodic and moves in a cyclic pattern, and that emotional relationships have to allow for the discrepancies of the parties involved. What he means is you're either in the mood or you're not. He wasn't.

I confess it took the wind out of my sails, until I went to catch my bus. There was snow on the ground and everything looked as though it were wrapped in white tissue paper. You felt that if you peeled it off you'd find a spring hat or a dollar bill or a ticket to Paris. I bought one single daffodil in a little pot.

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When I got to the lab I put it up on the window-sill. With the light coming through its petals it looked like home-churned butter. Even Mr. Randall, who never makes a joke because he's head of the laboratory, made a joke. " Daffodils are yellow, wish I were your fellow," he recited. " Primavera, eh, Betsy? Well, I hope it won't take the starch out of you if I ask you to stay late tonight. The fragments of the Santa Querido meteor arrived this morning . . ."

It had been in the newspapers for three weeks; first, the reports from observatories all over the country, describing the spots and eruptions on the planet Saturn; and then the fall of that great meteor in the Arizona desert. The crater it had ploughed was almost five miles long, and it was filled with strange and glittering rock fragments. We felt pretty good about the fact that Severn Labs had been chosen to do the analysis on ore that might, just possibly might, have fallen through space for a billion miles, all the way from the Rings of Saturn.

Randall's voice droned on. " Jensen is running some geological tests on them, but we'd like you to do the report. It has to go to Princeton in the morning. Those atomic fellows want our findings. Think you can handle it? "

" I'll try."

" Good, Jensen's got the material vatted in a salt solution. Just leave everything undisturbed. His notes will be ready by six. Get your dinner, and then be back here by eight if you can."

" Yes, Mr. Randall."

" And don't discuss it. We're all under a top secret regimen as long as we're being investigated. It's Los Alamos for all of us if we come out with a clean record." He paused at the door. " You're not nervous here at night, are you? "

" Oh, no."

" Remember, don't disturb the material. Just do up the report."

It was a long, quiet ride to the thirty-fifth floor. They keep little night-lights burning in the halls, and it's sort of hospitaly and antiseptic without people around. I get lonely without people. The gregarious instincts of extroverts, is what Arnold says.

He kind of tidies up my mind for me. Guide to Betsy Simms's mind—see Dr. Arnold Allan. Just the same, I started to wish he were beside me. Somehow, I didn't want to go into the office

" It's all gobbledy-gook," I said out loud.

". . . Oook," echoed the empty hall.

While I fumbled for the key, I remembered with terrible clarity every tale of terror I'd ever read; and then, like a slide being pushed across the eye of a reflector, a picture came jumping into my mind, a picture of the nervous rock fragments in the room just next to me, bumping, bumping, bumping against Mr. Jensen's carefully sealed vat.

As soon as I was inside the door, my nervous flutterings vanished. I snapped on the light and was once again in the calm, reasonable sanctuary of science. I looked about me with pride.

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I had to walk through the main office to get to Jensen's lab.

I looked at the closed door to his lab. I thought I had heard a noise, a funny, scraping noise, like rock against glass. A sudden wind blew the door of the laboratory open and I could see the gleaming, soap-bubble shine of all those transparent containers, standing row upon row against the wall.

It was unmistakable—and it came with a jolting suddenness—the sound of splashing.

I don't know what I could have been frightened of—I did it without thinking—I took the knob and slammed the door shut. And then I stood there a moment, in the corridor, staring at it. After a moment, my voice coming very thin, very unfamiliar, I managed to speak. "Who's in there?"

I bent against the closed door. The splashing sounds had stopped. I tried a different, a more cordial attack. "Nobody's in there, are you?" Of course there was no answer. "Mice," I promised myself, and I walked boldly inside.

I saw it, first thing.

I remember how my knees buckled. I remember that my mouth got all stiff, and that my fingertips and toes went to sleep. I wanted to faint, but got only as far as being slightly whirly.

"Oh . . ." I said. It was a moan, involuntary, from deep within me. For it was there, in plain sight, just as it had been before, beckoning to me, bathed in green light, there within the jar.

I did the only thing I could think of. I started to cry. I sat down just in front of it, put my face in my hands and wept quietly and persistently, wept to myself. I heard the slow, delicate tapping on the glass. "Don't!" I implored. And looked at it again.

The voice was masculine, the tongue English; I was looking at it directly. The lips moved, entreating me: "The lid—the lid—lift up . . ." They said it to me, softly, as if from a great distance.

There was no longer any denying it, unless I wanted to doubt my sanity. It was a man, a beautiful man, only inches high, formed perfectly, like a lovely statuette, bobbing in the jar, living in the jar, breathing, the bubbles rising in a tiny stream, the eyes straining, fixed on mine, entreating me. And at the bottom of the jar was a layer of sand . . . rock fragments from the fallen meteor, dissolved in salt. Rock brought here from Arizona, scraping, floating, struggling to live.

"Go away," I begged. "Don't be there." I cried harder.

The greenish light from within the jar suddenly brightened fiercely, like an emerald in the sun. "The lid," the lips said, muted, blending with the bubbles. "Turn it . . . free . . ."

I felt the breath being mangled out of me with fear. Did it read thoughts? "Don't be afraid," the muffled whisper said.

"Aah!" I cried, whimpering. I turned and went away from it, putting the distance of the room between us. The light darted after me, like a beacon moving across black gulfs, green and probing.

And all the way across the room I heard: "Please help . . ."

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Maybe that did it. The terror in the room was shared, my fears echoed. The terrible racketing of my heart slowed. I glanced at it quickly, and then away again. My eyes returned, fascinated; it was the handsomest facsimile of a man I had ever seen. I went back. And opened the jar.

Then I put my hands over my eyes. I suppose I was expecting a rending explosion, a shattering noise; but there was nothing like that. Only a deep sigh of relief. A gentle voice, saying, "Thank you. Thank you. That was very good of you."

I remained frosted with fear, rigid. It went on: "Is my light getting into your eyes? It should let up any minute."

I peeked between my fingers and gasped. It had shot up, released from the jar; it had filled out, miraculously, and now stood looking down at me. I checked the details. It looked like a man. In every respect, except for that luminosity, that greenish radiation, it looked exactly—sweet heavens!—like a naked man.

I groped wildly across the room, scrambled hastily to Dr. Jensen's cupboard and found his smock. I threw it across the room. "Put that on. Cover yourself up. Get dressed."

I heard the starched folds crackle. The green light gloomed and faded. I turned to face it again.

It was seated in a chair, looking at me with infinite respect and gratitude. It was smiling faintly. If I talk to it, I told myself, then there's no turning back. I stared at it unblinkingly.

The real truth is that I've always dreamt of something glamorous and unusual happening to me; but nothing ever has.

"I don't quite know where I am," it said slowly.

I felt the room begin to waver at me again. Urgently, I said, "Look, it's some kind of a trick, isn't it? You hypnotized me."

"I beg your pardon?" It still looked dazed.

"The jar, I mean—all that hocus-pocus."

It glanced at the jar with a shudder. "I'd be in there yet," it said in a strangled tone, "if it weren't for you."

"You aren't trying to tell me that . . . well, that you—you came out of there?" I heard my voice scooting up the scale.

It put its head in its hands. "The shock," it muttered. "It tore everything loose. I felt myself spinning . . ."

"But those rocks! They came from a meteor! It fell through space!"

"I fell for weeks," it said softly. "Maybe months. I thought that it would go on and on for ever."

Desperately, I cried, "Those rocks are fragments—torn off from another planet!"

"I know . . ."

I felt my mouth go slack. "Where are you from?"

"Saturn." It rose and bowed slightly, then sat down again.

Inwardly, I began to recite a catechism to myself. I'm Betsy Simms. This is New York.

"Are you all right?" it asked solicitously. I nodded my head

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dumbly. It went on: "I see I'm a sort of phenomenon to you."

I waggled my head; it felt loose on my shoulders.

"I assure you," it said anxiously, "that I'm nothing to be afraid of."

"Oh, no?" I whispered.

"It's true I'm a little out of the ordinary—but so are *you*—to me. I'm as confused as you are."

"You speak English!" I said suddenly.

"That was my job—at home. I'm an air-waves analyst—"

"A what?"

"We send the waves through channels, decode them, reconstruct languages, and then—"

"Never mind," I said. "Some other time."

We sat there, looking at each other cautiously.

Then I broke the silence again.

"Couldn't you—" I turned to it again—"Couldn't you find some way to get back? To go home?"

Home. The word seemed to crystallize its dilemma. That sad, lost look came over its face again. "I don't think there is a way to get back," it said despairingly. "At least, no way occurs to me. I don't even understand how this happened, or why . . ."

A passing streak of moonlight crossed its face. I drew in my breath. It looked like a great viking, huge and green and shining. "Whatever you decide," it said gently, "I'm entirely at your disposal."

Suddenly I realized. I was on the threshold of an adventure that nobody living had ever had before. I was communicating with the expanding universe, in touch with one of the great riddles of the twentieth century. Why should *I* turn my back on it?

Besides, it was so helpless, so cast adrift. It was all the stray dogs, lost cats, and orphaned children I'd ever seen in my life. My heart went out to it.

"I'm going to help you!" I said breathlessly. "I could keep you out of sight in the flat. You could sleep on the couch, and then when it gets light go out on the fire-escape till Ruthie—that's my room-mate—leaves. If anybody sees you, I'll say you came to wash the windows." I nodded. "That's not bad, for a beginning. We'll go and get a taxi. By the way, what's your name?"

"Yrtxxe," it said.

"Very pretty. I'll call you Sam. Let's go," I said, and switched out the lights. Right then and there I knew we were done for. He was as burnished as old copper, and twice as shiny.

"You're glowing," I said in despair.

"Thank you," it said. "My colour's always been good."

"If only you were A.C.," I muttered.

"Beg your pardon?"

"I'd short-circuit you."

It looked at me. "The light disturbs you, doesn't it?"

"It's kind of pretty," I said gently.

It followed me docilely into the lift. "I hope you don't have

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a sinky stomach," I said, " but if you fell all the way from Saturn this should be a breeze." I pressed the button. The lift descended gently. It seemed to like it. " That was very pleasant. I don't suppose we'd have time to . . ." It lingered in the cage.

" Come on," I said firmly. " We haven't a minute to lose."

The taxi had turned into our street. " One thing," I said hurriedly. " Don't do anything on your own for the next day or two. Let me do the planning," I added.

I took it by the hand, a little gingerly, and we went inside. Fortunately, the hallway was empty. I left it at the top of the stairs and went ahead to check the flat. Ruthie was sleeping, so we were all right, on that score. I stuck my head out of the door and beckoned to it.

Suddenly, as we stood there together, just inside the door, the enormity of it all washed over me. It was so big, it was so good to look at, it was so much man, it was from Saturn—it was terrific!

" Where am I going to hide you? " I whispered desperately. I looked at the settle bench but it would pleat my visitor! Nobody in or out of this world could sleep on my chairs. That left the kitchen table, the top of the bookcase, and the bath-tub.

" I'll tell you straight," I said. " There's no bed for you."

It moistened a finger and held it up to the air. " Current's perfect," it said, " no pitch or down-draught."

" What? "

" I'll show you." It fell backwards. In another moment it was floating gently above me, six feet off the floor. Then it regained its feet again. " Any place without too much wind will do."

" No," I said firmly. " Suppose Ruthie should get up for a drink and run into *that* ! "

It nodded its head in agreement. " Better not risk it."

" Can't you do it *our* way? "

" Yes. If I have to."

" All right." I sighed deeply. " I'll set my alarm for you for 5.30. Now, when it goes off, get up and crawl out there on the fire-escape. If anybody looks out, just make a motion like this." I demonstrated. " They'll think you're the window-cleaner. Then, when Ruthie's gone, we'll have breakfast and make plans."

" That won't be necessary," it said. " I don't eat."

I took this in my stride. I was beginning to get oriented. " I'm not sorry to hear it," I said. " What with the cost of living . . ."

It looked at me puzzled. " It's an economic term," I went on.

I went into the bathroom and pointed to the tub. " Sleep well," I said, " and try not to worry."

" You too."

That stopped me. I looked at it strangely. Its voice was intimate, compelling, affectionate. It made me suddenly feel shy with it. " Thanks," I said, and went into the bedroom.

Ruthie came in round eight o'clock to wake me. " I've got to run.

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Oh, listen, one thing, honey. There was a terrible ring in the tub this morning. If you get a minute . . ."

"Sure," I said.

"You know, the plumber came yesterday. Do you suppose he took a bath?"

"I don't know . . ."

"It's kind of shiny. Almost green."

I wet my lips. "The ring?"

"Yeah."

"I'll take care of it. You'd better go, you're late."

She nodded and hurried to the door. "Oh, by the way, the landlady's got a window-washer. He's working off the kitchen, so don't be scared."

She was gone. I climbed into my robe and slippers and sped into the kitchen. It was there, patiently making sweeping motions at our window with a wash-cloth. When it saw me, it smiled and waved. I found myself thinking that Apollo must have looked like that with the morning sun behind him.

"Good morning," I called. "Come in."

It leapt through the open window and stood before me. Its legs were blue from the knees down and it shook.

"You're cold." I motioned it towards the stove and lit all the burners. "You've got to have some clothes first thing." I gulped a cup of coffee. "I'll phone the lab and tell them I'll be late." I looked at it speculatively. "Can you tell me your clothes size?"

"I've never worn any," it said politely. "Our climatic conditions are—"

"I'll manage," I said. "We're not expecting company, so you'll be all right here. Don't answer the phone—that thing—and keep the blinds pulled."

"Did you sleep well?" it asked as I hurried to the door.

I stopped. "Fine. Did you?"

"I thought about you."

My toes curled slightly in my woolly slippers, and a spot on the floor had my undivided attention.

"Do you mind my saying that to you?"

Thoughts of Arnold were suddenly with me. "Well," I said hesitantly. Then I gave up and took the bull by the horns. "Sam," I said, "I don't know anything about your world, but down here a situation like this isn't considered quite the thing. I mean, you'd better *not* think about me, at least during the night."

He looked as bewildered as a pup left in a pound. "This is a democracy," I said at last. "You think what you want to."

It looked at me serenely. "If it's all the same to you," it said, "I'll think about you."

It was a lovely full circle, like a man's arms around you. Right then and there I made one decision. I wouldn't be thinking of Sam as It any more; he would be he to me from now on, and it was a lot more than a question of grammar.

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When I finally tore myself away, I went down to the shops and bought all the things I wouldn't dare to give to Arnold. At the end of two hours and a half I was broke, late for work, and troubled in my mind. I took all my purchases with me to the office and deposited them in my locker.

The day was as long as a best-seller. Around five I went in to Mr. Randall and pleaded a headache. He let me go and I was home fifteen minutes before Ruthie was due. Sam was sitting in the dark when I opened the door. I could see his faint green shine, dimmer today as a result of his bath.

"Hullo," I said, dumping my parcels all on the couch and sinking down beside them with a sigh. "Anything to report?"

"No," he said. "Nothing happened."

He held the sweater up and smiled, and he laughed out loud at the shorts, and I laughed, too. I stopped when he started to peel off the smock.

"Hey," I said. "In there."

He looked at me blankly. "Custom of the country," I said. He nodded and disappeared.

Five minutes later he came back in the doorway. Talk about Pygmalion and his Galatea. I had made myself a matinée idol out of one tweed suit, a bow tie, and a sweater.

"Golly," I said in a small voice. For a moment the whole thing had me on the ropes. Then I motioned him to a place beside me. I took his hand in what I tried hard to make a sisterly gesture.

"Sam," I said, "I've got to tell my room-mate about you. She's a nice girl with a big heart, but the idea of you may be a little too much for her at first. I just want you to trust me. If I ask you to float . . . float. You may even have to shine in the dark." I looked at him wistfully. "It's a shame to make a side-show out of you, but she's got to believe us. O.K.?"

"What's your name?" he said suddenly.

"Betsy."

"Betsy," he said. The name sounded new and very sweet. "May I call you that?"

"Sure," I said weakly. Then I heard Ruthie on the stairs. "Get in there, quick, and stay in there till I call for you."

He moved across the room swiftly, closing the bedroom door just as Ruthie came in. The boxes and tissue paper were still in plain sight. I brushed them to the floor.

"Ruthie, sit down and compose yourself," I said, "I've got news for you."

"Well," I said, after twenty minutes, "that's the long and short of it."

Ruthie, being Ruthie, merely sat there in a very deep coma.

"Say something," I begged.

"I'm thinking," she answered quietly.

"Can I bring him in?"

When Sam appeared, she looked at him and gasped.

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"Sam, this is Ruthie. She lives with me."

"Does it talk?" Ruthie whispered.

"Certainly!" I said, irritated.

Sam smiled. "Good evening," he said.

Ruthie just shook her head. "Can you beat it?"

"Better sit down, Sam," I said. "We've got to talk about our problem. Now look at him hard, Ruthie."

It didn't seem to cause her any pain. She stared at him with a foolish smile. That went on for quite some time.

"Ruthie," I said firmly. "Ruthie, listen to me!"

She tore her gaze away. "Yes?" she said vaguely.

"Can we pass him off as a man?"

"What?"

"Can we pass him off as a man? That's our problem."

"As far as I'm concerned," she said appreciatively, "he's passed."

"I mean, those feelings aside," I said coldly. "Can we get him a place to live? Find him work? Can we introduce him to Arnold?"

"Any time," she said with conviction.

"Well, we've got to try. Arnold's taking me to dinner tonight. That'll be the acid test. You come along with Sam. He's a friend of yours from home." I turned to Sam. "Arnold's a dear friend of long standing," I explained.

Sam took his new pipe out of his pocket and stroked it speculatively. "You belong to him," he said with great finality.

"Hey, wait a minute. I didn't say that."

"You don't care to belong to him?"

It was like talking basic English. With Sam it was either yes or no. "I'm thinking about belonging to him," I said weakly. "A sort of incubation period."

"Ah," he said unhappily. "You're thinking about it. That's something I can understand very well." He rose, bowed slightly, and quickly sat down again.

Arnold was at his own special table in the corner. I told him about Ruthie and her friend. "Do you consciously try *not* to be alone with me?" he asked patiently.

I looked at him. "Arnold," I said, "you know that isn't true."

"It has to be, or we would have been married long ago."

All I could say was, "What's the rush?"

"There's the biological factor, for one thing. I'm only human."

I drank some more of my drink. "You know my views on that."

"I do. They're lofty." He sighed. "Damn it, Betsy, you tempt me. I've faced that unalterable fact. I asked you to marry me. I'm asking you again."

"I don't know what's the matter with me!" I wailed.

"You're suffering from high moral tone," he said, handing me his hanky. I hid my face in it and thought of the strange and giddy feelings I had had since I found Sam, and cried all the harder.

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" My dear," said Arnold contritely, " you *are* frazzled. I think the strain of your job's really telling. We won't talk about it any more tonight. Better? "

I wiped the mascara out of my eyes and smiled wanly. " Yes, thank you, Arnold."

" All right. The beast in me is subdued and you're safe."

" Yes, thank you, Arnold."

Maybe *his* beast was subdued, I thought, but mine was on the prowl for the first time in my life—and its prey was coming across the room towards me. Ruthie came in as though she were leading a band. And Sam was enough to strike one up, too, as he threaded his way among the tables. Even Arnold's eyes widened.

" He's larger than life-size," he muttered. " Who is it? "

" Sam Saturnis," I said. " I think he's from San Diego."

" They grow them big in Southern California," Arnold said, standing up. The two men shook hands. I noticed with a kind of primeval satisfaction that Arnold winced at the grip. Then I was ashamed of myself, so I moved closer to him.

" Where are you staying? " Arnold asked.

" With friends," Sam said easily.

" Oh," Arnold said, and a silence fell. We all smiled.

Ruthie eyed the wine bottle frantically. Arnold beckoned for glasses. Sam took his and put it carefully aside. Arnold's face darkened. " I hope you're not one of those California wine enthusiasts," he said.

" Drink up! " I shouted.

Sam looked at his glass with bewilderment. " How? " he asked.

" Here's how! " I said emphatically, and tossed mine off in one swallow. Sam nodded imperceptibly and did likewise.

I set the glass down with a click. " My," I said, " but that was refreshing. How do you feel, Sam? "

It was classic. " It tickles," he said, " all the way down. That's all."

" Yes," Arnold said. " Well."

" Sam's a teetoller, mostly," Ruthie explained.

There was another silence. In the background a rumba band began to throb urgently. " You don't rumba, do you, Arnold? "

" I drink," Arnold said, re-filling his glass. " And then I rumba."

Sam glanced out at the dance floor. " I believe I could do that," he said. Ruthie and I exchanged looks.

" It tickles," Arnold said sourly.

" Try it with me," I said and got up. We moved out on the floor together. Space and time fell away. I leaned closer to him. There was no doubt about it. We were star-crossed.

" Something smells good," Sam said.

" It's me," I told him happily. " Ten dollars an ounce."

" You're soft to the touch," Sam said. " Let's take a walk."

I looked at him, startled. " I can't," I said mournfully.

" You're thinking about him." He motioned toward Arnold.

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" Yes . . . I guess so . . ."

" You'll think about me sooner or later," he said. " I'll wait."

By the time we got back to the table, Arnold had taken the bottle out of the wine cooler, plunked it solidly down before him, and was cradling it in his arms. " Sublimation," he said loudly. " It's any man's prerogative. Isn't that right, Saturnis? "

" Please, Arnold," I begged him. " No shop talk."

" Sorry," Arnold mumbled. Then, by way of explanation, he turned back to Sam. " You're too big. Big guys make me combative. Anxiety neurosis." He held out his hand. " Forget it."

" Sure," said Sam. " Anybody can blow his top." He looked at me, pleased with himself. " Colloquialism."

" Ruthie," I said, " you look like you're getting a headache."

" No, it's in my neck," she said resignedly. " Come on, Sam."

" Going? " Arnold asked with vast relief.

" I never stay more than ten minutes anywhere," Ruthie told him bitterly. She took Sam by the arm. " Lovely to have seen you." And then, menacingly to me, " I'll see you at home."

Arnold watched them depart, his face brightening as they passed out of sight. " Something really funny about that guy . . ."

" I thought he was sort of nice."

He tapped the bottle nervously. " I'm out of training. I guess I must be a little tight."

Sam and I walked until we came to the Village. The park was empty except for a man feeding biscuits to the pigeons. " Sam," I said, " the time has come." I took his large warm hand. " I'll come and see you as often as I can, and this week while I'm on holiday, we'll do all kinds of nice things together."

" I understand," he said quietly. " You can't go on keeping me."

We found him a little room under the eaves in a funny, sagging old house near the park. It was on a sedate street that still had the high-collared respectability of Henry James's New York.

" Look at your view," I said, strangled with the sense of intimacy and remoteness, which emanated, at the same time, from him.

He moved obediently to the window. " Roofs," he said. " And sky." His tone softened over that. " Sky . . . Blue sky . . . It's somewhere out there . . . my home . . ."

I came and stood beside him. He didn't stir. He seemed lost to me as he stared out the window. I wanted to wrench him back down to Earth—to fix him here—to keep him here. My shoulder touched his. His eyes remained on the horizon.

" Sam," I said, in my most seductive tone. " Look at me."

Reluctantly, he dropped his gaze. I had had momentary wild urges, but they paled and vanished under that curiously unemotional look. What was the matter with him? Or with me?

I said, " O.K., I'm a dud. Forget it."

He answered slowly. " Betsy, are you trying to tell me something? "

" Who—me? " I said dejectedly. " What gave you that idea? "

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He put his hand under my chin and tilted my head up. "We're friends, aren't we?"

"I'll settle for that," I sighed. "If that's all I have coming. I'm not one to press an issue."

He turned away from the window. "I'd better forget all that out there. Begin making a life for myself here." He patted me impersonally. "You'll have to show me how."

"How far would you care to take that?" I said tightly. "There's a lot to living."

"Tell me," he said in an interested tone.

"I'll show you—up to a point."

I showed him—up to a point.

After that we went on a spree. I bought him an ice-cream soda and made him drink it. He liked it. I took him tea-dancing; he liked that, too. We went to the theatre and the Museum of Modern Art. We window-shopped at twilight and walked through St. Patrick's Cathedral. We went ice-skating, we saw the ocean liners come in at the pier, and took a bus through the Bronx. We went to the zoo and the aquarium and drove through Holland Tunnel. We went to Yankee Stadium and Madison Square Garden, a UN session, and a striptease show. It was a three-ring circus, a Roman holiday, a sob-story. I ended up weary, broke, and crazily in love.

The Sunday night before I had to go back to work I left him alone in his room and settled down to check the damages to my heart, my bank-account, and my morale. Ruthie made me milk-toast for supper and sat with me while I put my hair up.

"Well," she said owlishly, "you've had quite a time."

"Yes," I said weakly.

"What about *my* friend Sam?" she asked evenly.

I put my head under the pillows. "I love that thing!" I wailed. "I love him like he was flesh and blood!"

"Come out. Let's talk about it."

"There's not much to say." I looked at her with tearful eyes. "I've got news for you. I don't think he knows anything about love. *Anything*," I repeated.

"Oh, no!" Ruthie said, paling.

I nodded vigorously. "I think they have other methods. Something like that. It must be!"

"Keen," she said. "Now, all you have to do is dump Arnold, learn all about Saturnic birds and bees, and you're in business."

"Don't joke," I said. "I'm so unhappy I could die."

Ruthie sighed. "Gee, honey, I don't know what to tell you. It's outside my range. Nothing like this has ever happened to me."

"Nothing like this has ever happened to anyone!" I cried. "He's so touching. He's so gentle. He's so kind. He's so cuddly."

"All six feet four?"

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"He's like a beautiful green meadow—clean and quiet and peaceful."

"You *have* got it bad!"

"I've got it. But what'll I do with it?"

"I think you'd better see more of a certain psychiatrist," she said. "And he's a good guy, too."

Then the phone rang. It was Sam. "Betsy," he said softly. "I know it's late but I've got to see you."

My blood-pressure began to rise. "Oh," I said swiftly, "I *never* go to bed before one."

His voice came over the line vigorously. "I believe the time has come. The time for us to go for a walk."

"Yes," I said, all choked up. "That would be lovely."

"I'll meet you in ten minutes, downstairs."

I hung up and turned to Ruthie, bright-eyed. "He wants to take a walk."

"You see," she said. "You figured it wrong. He's just a slow starter."

The park was cold and frosty and the benches were damp, but it could have been a beach in Bermuda as far as I was concerned. I was generating enough warmth for the tropic of Capricorn.

Sam took his pipe out and put it in his mouth. He looked calm and reflective and wise. He said, "Betsy, close your eyes."

I took a deep breath and did so. Expectantly, I raised my face to him. Nothing happened. Nothing.

I waited. Minutes passed. He remained silent by my side.

I took a chance and stole a glance at him. His eyes were shut, screwed tight with some kind of enormous effort—and yet there was a passionately tender look on his face. It must have been some kind of a strain for him, because he was breathing hard.

"Sam," I said softly, after awhile. "I'm here. At your side."

His eyes opened. "We didn't make contact," he said sadly.

I looked at him.

"My mind went out to meet yours," he said. "But they didn't meet. If they'd touched, you would have known it. It's electricity. There's no mistaking it when it hits you."

"Wait a minute," I said. "I'm a little confused."

"I asked you to go for a walk. When you accepted, I hoped—"

"I often go for walks. What's that got to do with it?"

"Of course," he said. "How could you be expected to know?" He paused a moment. "At home, when a man and a woman think that they love each other, they go for walks together. It's as simple as that. It means they want to contact each other's minds—establish a current. That's what we call it—going for a walk . . ."

"Holy Moses!" I said. "Is that how you do it up there?"

In answer, he grabbed me by the shoulders. "Think!" he said wildly. "Concentrate! The way I have since I first saw you!"

"Darling, listen! There's something I must tell you—"

But he couldn't be stopped. His voice was shaking with passion.

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"I know you've been thinking about Arnold. Forget him." He whirled me around, pulling me closer to stare down at me. "You want to. I know you do. That much I've felt all along. At least that much. Betsy!" he said, "make contact! Try!"

Feverishly, I said, "You don't understand. Look. Things are different here. Lots of things. You've seen that for yourself. We eat. You don't. You glow. We don't. You *think* about someone you love—you concentrate. So do we, but—well, that isn't all."

He began to smile, as if there had been a great illumination, a light dawning. "Ah," he said. "Is that it? I didn't know—"

"Yes," I said, and I puddled some dirt around with my foot.

He moved closer to me. His mouth brushed my ear. "When you love someone—what happens?"

I blushed. "Well," I said, clearing my throat. Golly . . .

"My thoughts are close to you," he whispered. "Don't be afraid."

"I'm embarrassed," I cried. "I don't think I can talk about it."

"Betsy," he implored, "I *must* know. You're the only person who can tell me."

"Sam," I said, "don't you *feel* anything for me?"

He looked at me blankly. He was silent. I blushed again, to the roots of my hair. "We're worlds apart, Sam. That's all."

I got up reluctantly and put my hands against his face. "I'm glad you don't know what you're missing," I told him gently, and then I bent down and kissed him tenderly on the forehead. How I'd wanted to do that—for so long!

It didn't take. I suddenly felt the cold of the park and the chill of the wet benches. The trees had never seemed so lifeless; the sky so black and unfriendly.

The minute I came into the office the next day I knew something was wrong. Mr. Randall came into my cubicle. "Betsy," he said quietly, "don't bother to change. Just step into my office. There's a gentleman there who wants to speak to you."

My mouth got as dry as a gravel path and my knees went suddenly soft. "Now?" I said.

"Just tell the truth, Betsy, for all our sakes."

I followed him in. Mr. Randall said, "This is Mr. Sharpe, who has been investigating you."

Mr. Sharpe smiled and said, "Good morning."

I was so nervous I almost dropped a curtsy. Mr. Randall shoved a chair under me and I collapsed into it gratefully. "Miss Simms," said Mr. Sharpe, "you know that the Severn Labs have been under investigation for some time."

"Yes. Some of us may be going to Los Alamos."

"That's right. You know the nature of the work being done there and understand its importance to the country?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then you understand how certain we must be of the personnel working there."

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"Yes."

"Miss Simms, who has been your companion for the last week?"

My ears began to ring violently. "He's a friend," I said.

"What's his name?"

"Saturnis," I said, and I choked over it.

"This Mr. Saturnis," he continued, "have you known him long?"

"A little while."

"And what, may I ask, is the nature of your relationship?"

"Friends," I insisted. "We're friends."

"I see." He and Mr. Randall looked at each other.

"Miss Simms," said Mr. Sharpe, "we have kept a close check on your activities for the last six months. During that period we have no record of this man. He appeared shortly after the prospect of your going to Los Alamos had arisen. We have not been able to establish any kind of identification for him. We'd like you to help us."

"There's nothing I can tell you," I said dully.

Mr. Sharpe looked unhappy. "Your friend has been taken into custody pending a fuller investigation. I'm afraid we'll have to hold you, too. I urge you to give us every co-operation."

The atmosphere at City Hall was a little more on the antiseptic side. They brought me into Mr. Sharpe's office and a man with a notebook came in, too.

"If you're involved with this man," Mr. Sharpe said gently, "I advise you not to take the full load on yourself. You won't be protecting him. If he's actually a spy, we'll get him, whether you cover for him or not. Now would you care to make a statement?"

It was zero hour and I knew it. "O.K." I said hesitantly, "but remember, you asked me." I paused slightly. "The man I've been meeting isn't a man at all. I don't know quite what to call him. He arrived two weeks ago in the Santa Querido meteoric rock which fell from Saturn."

I folded my hands in my lap and waited—rather primly, I confess. It was my innings and I knew it. The man who was taking notes gaped at me—and then a look of great compassion crossed his face.

I told the whole story with all the trimmings, except for the personal details, which weren't any of their business anyway. When I was all through, Mr. Sharpe took out his handkerchief and mopped his face. "Bring him in," he said.

Sam followed the man in. "I've told them, Sam," I said.

We just told the story over and over. Four or five officers were ringed around us. At last a numb silence descended. Then Mr. Sharpe spoke. "He's either a super spy or he's what he says he is. We can't find a single item on him, can we?"

"No." It was a chorus of replies.

"You'd have just that," I said hotly, "if he were a real person. You'd have a birth certificate or a draft card or something."

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" Not if he were a foreigner. Still, nobody answering his description has entered this country by any method known to us." Mr. Sharpe wrenched at his collar as if it were choking him. " I don't know," he muttered. " I don't know . . ."

After a few moments they led Sam out. A doctor came in later and shrugged. " Homo sapiens," he said. " Just like the rest of us."

Mr. Sharpe paced like a caged animal. Then he said desperately, " We got to try everything. Get that psychiatrist."

Of course, that psychiatrist had to turn out to be Arnold.

The next day we all assembled in Arnold's office. Leda, his assistant, was there, too, wearing a little black dress that cost as much as my income tax and looked as if it had been painted on.

We all sat down facing Leda and Arnold. Sam wasn't the least bit nervous. He glanced at the charts and blocks on the big desk and grinned. For three-and-a-half hours they ran all the intelligence tests on him. I think he enjoyed himself very much. Then they got to the subtle part. Arnold asked Sam if he minded a rather intimate discussion in front of people—if it would inhibit him. Sam was perfectly agreeable, so they started off.

Then I saw that it was Leda who was taking over and I began to get hot under the collar. She motioned him to a seat beside her and I knew he was getting lungfuls of that perfume she wears.

" Do we seem strange to you? " she asked with considerable charm.

" Not at all."

" Good.. We don't want any barriers."

" I take it you want me to talk about myself," Sam said.

Leda made it an invitation. " Would you? " she said softly.

The investigators leaned forward tensely. Sam talked. He told everything: how he had lived and worked, what home looked like, how he had arrived on Earth, what he thought of Manhattan. It was super-science fiction with sex-appeal. Leda felt it, too. She moved a little closer to him and hung breathlessly on every word.

When he had finished, everyone leaned back and gasped, the way you do when somebody has been safely hauled off a high place. I was tired and all keyed up. I jumped to my feet at that and shouted to Sam, " Float, Sam! Show them! "

" What's this? " Mr. Sharpe asked. " What's going on? "

" Only this," Sam said, and he lay back on the air.

There was a long silence in the room.

I knew Arnold believed at last; he stood there blinking and looking quite frightened. As for Mr. Sharpe, he had sat down as though suddenly hit in the stomach. He said, after a while, " My eyes don't lie. I'm convinced! This is a very solemn occasion."

" Hear, hear! " said Leda. She prowled restlessly about the office. " It's rather like discovering America or something." She smiled happily at Sam.. " And we're the discoverers."

Mr. Sharpe struggled back to his feet. " Wait a minute. Don't forget the circumstances under which it—I mean to say *he*—

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was found. He shows up in a lab where top secret work is being done. He gets involved," and here he looked at me apologetically, "with a member of the staff who is shortly going to Los Alamos. I'll have to consult Washington," he concluded. "I don't even know if we can hold him or what we're supposed to do."

Sam spoke quietly. "I can assure you that I have no hidden motives. My arrival was an accident. In fact, if you can find any way to send me back, I'd be most grateful. To tell you the truth, I'm getting a bit homesick."

My heart split down the middle at that.

Leda inclined her head toward him. "You don't mean that," she said. "You've hardly given us a chance."

Give her a chance, I thought bitterly, and I might as well get myself ploughed under.

"Well," said Mr. Sharpe, "we'll put it on a plane for Washington tonight. We'll see what the Pentagon has to say."

They planned to take a morning plane, and they asked if either Leda or Arnold could go along as technical adviser. Leda jumped at the chance. I could see that she would be as close to Sam as eggs and bacon the minute they were out of sight.

I went up and shook hands with Sam. It was awful. "I know they'll like you," I said. It wasn't exactly eloquent, but I couldn't think of anything else to say. "You'll be all right, won't you?"

"Don't give him a thought, dear," Leda said. It wasn't advice, it was a warning.

Sam held my hands very hard. "Thank you," he said fervently. "Thank you for everything." There was a look in his face which told me he wanted to say more. It was like a torrent held back, dammed up. "I'll phone you," he said.

"I'll wait for the call," I said, and on that less than rapturous exchange I stood back while they filed out. I was alone with Arnold.

"Arnold," I said, "do you think I'm a worm?"

"You're a little mixed up, that's all," he said quietly.

"I hope you're not going to scold me, or tell me that I'm in the grip of an adolescent emotional trauma, or anything like that."

"I'm not."

"You see—he belongs to me. He's mine, in a way, because I found him. I'm the one who let him out of there when he wanted to get out. I looked after him and I—" I stopped.

"And you fell in love with him," Arnold finished it for me. "Betsy, this is far graver than you think."

"Oh, it's grave, all right. I know that."

"Darling," he said, "this *being*—how do you know—how can you tell—" For once he didn't have all the words. It made him seem pathetic, nicer than I'd ever seen him.

I helped out by telling *him*. "I know he's different, and I know *how* he's different. I don't think he can love me at all."

"Then what are you going to do about it?"

"Well, first of all," I said weakly, "I think I'd better break off my engagement to you."

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He smiled wryly. "All right," he said, "but if you ever change your mind—if you need me . . ."

Love is hell. At ten-thirty three nights later the phone rang. I made it across the room like an Olympic sprinter. When I picked up the receiver I heard an insane babble of tongues, and then Sam's voice. "Betsy!" he cried. "Is that you, Betsy?"

"Sam! Are you all right? Where are you? What are they going to do with you?"

"Fine!" he shouted. "Can you come down to the Splendide?"

"Aren't you in Washington?"

"Half an hour—the lobby!"

"All right," I said. "I'll be there. Sam, darling—"

The Splendide, lit up at night, looked like Valhalla. Inside was like a bargain basement at a January sale. I thought maybe it was a convention, until I saw who was in the middle of the crush. There were flash-bulbs going off in all directions. There was Sam, dead centre, blinking like a horse caught in a barn fire. And there was Leda, directing traffic and loving every minute of it.

I got up close enough to hear, but I couldn't catch Sam's eye. I knew right away it was a press conference to end all others.

Leda was talking in her chocolaty voice. "Yes," she was saying, "Congress sat in an emergency session."

"What was the verdict, Dr. Taylor?"

She grew arch. "I'm afraid they wanted all this to be very hush-hush, but it leaked out somehow. Some enterprising young man just happened to get a tip, I don't know from whom—" she laughed musically—"and here we are!"

"Power of the press," one reporter said laconically. "Tell us—is it really from Saturn?"

"Oh, absolutely."

I pushed in closer. By now I could see Sam's face, tired and strained and bewildered. My temper rose.

"Washington felt it would be best if he had a private identity—if he were integrated into American life." Leda went on, her face solemn. "After all, our country has always benefited by the absorption of other cultures. The preservation of the unique is also important culturally and sociologically. So, in the public interest, I have booked him for a country-wide tour."

"Under your management?"

"More or less." She smiled modestly, then held up her hands. "Boys," she said, "you've been wonderful, but we're both terribly exhausted. As you know, Saturday is Saturn Day—and as our activities will be centred in New York for the time being, you can call on us any time. Good night and thank you."

As she spoke, a couple of doormen came up and reinforced the police; they held the crowds back as Leda and Sam swept right past me and into the night. My spirits were low, as black as Indian ink.

By then most girls would have counted themselves out of the

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running, but it must be remembered that I come from Pennsylvania Dutch, a very stubborn stock. That's why I did what I did.

I called up Leda. I didn't tell her who I was because I knew she'd put me off, so I talked in a very tired Upper-New-York-State voice, told her that *Feminine Fortnight* wanted a picture of her at home, and asked if they could send an interviewer. Her voice was as smooth as cold cream. She'd love it.

I got there around five. Leda looked rather superior and amused, as if I'd done something extraordinary for a five-year-old. "My dear child," she said. "Come in."

I had intended to be very brittle and dry and cutting, but all I could think of was how she was exploiting my Sam.

"Listen, Leda," I said, "I can't think of anything smart and sophisticated to say to you, so I'll get right to the point. I don't like you or what you're doing to the man I happen to love. You've made such a monkey out of him that all he needs now is a little red hat and a tambourine.

"Furthermore," I said, "you're trying to make time with him. Sam has a very complicated libido, and I'm the only one who knows how it works."

"Dear, foolish Betsy," she said. "Libidos are my business." She paused. The silence had a momentous quality. "Sam and I have taken a walk."

I froze in my chair. "What did you say?"

"Sam—and—I—have—taken—a walk." She was enjoying every word. "We made contact. It was a new emotional experience. Quite thrilling. I felt like an explorer. I really did."

I sat before her, stunned, and she ploughed right on. "You have to be very delicately attuned," she said. "One might say it's a kind of emotional and intellectual radar."

I had heard enough. "Tell him I wish him every happiness," I said, and went out.

I don't know how I ever got home. I suppose I was taking the whole thing awfully seriously, but consider the circumstances. Sam had fallen to me from a star. He had come to me on Valentine's Day. The whole thing had been a fairy tale, except the witch ended up getting him.

Ruthie was out, and I was glad. I wanted to be alone to blot up my psyche. I didn't even turn on the lights. I was aware, with a suddenly tingling spine, of a light, a faint green light.

"Betsy," he said, "don't be afraid. It's me. Sam."

I felt like laughing out loud. Who else do I know who lights up the sky?

"Hullo," I said. Then I couldn't think of anything else at all.

"I've been here a long time."

"I was out," I said inanely.

There was a long silence. "Could we have the light on?" Sam said. "I'd like to see your face."

"Same old face," I said flippantly, only my voice was solemn.

"Please."

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I snapped on the light. He stared at me. "Betsy," he said, and then again, "Betsy . . ."

"How have you been?" I asked lamely.

"It's a long story," he said. "Will you listen?" Listen! He could have told me *War and Peace* and I would have listened. I sat down on a chair across the room from him and waited. He said, "You're too far away."

"I'm trying to get a little perspective," I told him shakily.

"That hat," he said at last, tentatively. "Nice."

I felt he was getting off on the wrong foot, engaged as he was to Leda. I decided to tell him so. "Do you think you ought to be paying me compliments—under the circumstances?"

"Yes. Of course." You'd think I was being unreasonable.

I said, quite formally, "I happen to know about your recent engagement to that eminent medical pioneer."

"My what?" And he blushed slightly. What with the faint greenish cast of his skin and the scarlet of the blush, he looked very Christmassy and exotic.

"I understand you went for a walk. Your fiancée inferred that it was as electrical as Times Square. Not that I'm probing," I said with dignity, "it's none of my business, except that you're here talking about my hat and all in such a personal way."

"But," he protested, "I want to talk about that and more."

"Yes?"

"I know about love!" he said triumphantly. "Real, human love. Your kind."

"I'm sure the object of it is very gratified."

"You don't seem very happy . . ."

My eyes widened. "What do you think I am? Why should I be happy because you and Leda act like high-tension wires?"

"Leda? What's she got to do with it?"

"I've seen Leda," I said coldly, "and she gave me a shock by shock account. She left out the real, human part, and I'd just as soon let it go at that, if you don't mind."

Slowly he said, "Leda lied to you. We did take a walk, she insisted on it, but nothing happened. Not even an erg."

"An erg?"

"It's a unit of energy. Not even that with Leda."

"You mean," I asked, swallowing, "you had ergs with me?" He was across the room in a flash and I felt myself pulled in close to him. Then he kissed me. *I* was out for the count. He helped me to a chair. "My own true love," he said quietly, sitting down beside me. I know it's a pretty archaic expression, but tears came to my eyes.

"I've read a lot of your books, and heard a lot of your love songs. They don't seem to have many ways of putting it." He paused. "Love," he said.

He was groping a bit, but I could tell immediately that he had the idea. "It's like that ride we took in the lift," he began.

"You mean smooth and sinky," I said.

He nodded. "And that place where we danced."

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"Everyone stood close together, Sam."

"Yes. Now it feels that way all the time, not just for one day."

"More, Sam," I murmured, "please go on."

"It's like the time you kissed me. It does things inside you like Arnold's wine. It's like your hat—very pretty. It makes any place home. It's taking a walk. It's contact." He was getting wound up now, and I didn't interrupt any more. "It's you, Betsy. Everything you showed me, everything you are. It means a vacuum being away from you. It means needing you, just having to have you. It means looking the same on the outside, but not being the same at all, missing something, a part that makes you go; without it, nothing works right any more."

He paused then a moment. "I couldn't feel anything like this before—because I never had anything like it in my life before. But now I've got to have it. Got to have you . . ."

A silence fell. If I hadn't been brought up in a strictly middle-class environment, I might have asked him what I knew I'd have to ask him sooner or later. Well, I thought, I'd worry about that later. The important thing was that he was able to feel, to react; that he had an emotional life, fresh and shiny.

"We'll get married," he said.

"Oh, you know about that, too."

"There's a place outside New York. We can be married before morning. We'll take a taxi."

"It's too expensive," I said.

He pulled out a wad of notes. "Leda explained money. That's why I did those silly things with her—I realized how much you'd spent on me, and I wanted to give it back."

"Sam," I said, "marriage is a very serious step."

His face was against my ear. "Let's take it."

"It has many ramifications . . ."

"Betsy . . . Betsy . . . Oh, Betsy . . ."

"All right," I said suddenly. "I think we'd probably better."

And that's the end of the story. We drove all night and ended up in a wonderfully musty little parlour, being married by a sleep-rumpled Justice of the Peace. Afterwards, he directed us to a hotel in the village. I guess my feelings were the same as any bride's—except for one detail. All Arnold had ever said to me about compatibility and harmonious relationships whirled through my head. Certain doubts began to assail me. Quite suddenly, I began to smile to myself. I knew I no longer had anything to fear.

Sam's voice came from the bathroom, Sam's voice raised in song, in lilting, serene song: *Folks are dumb—Where I come from—They don't have no yearning—Now I'm happy as can be—Doing what comes naturally!*

★ ★ ★

GERALD KERSH—RAY BRADBURY—WALTER MACKEN
in next month's ARGOSY

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DUSK BELOW HELVELLYN

He stood, towering gauntly between me and escape

by GRAHAM SUTTON

ON Dunmail Raise, I left the car by the huge tumbled cairn and began to plod up the fell.

There is awe in great hills, because the centuries have not changed them. And I thought, glancing down: A thousand years back, in the dusk when King Dunmail died, the Saxon victors must have wiped the sweat out of their eyes somewhere hereabouts, and leaned on their hacked swords, and stared into this same valley . . . And the fellside seemed thronged with hurrying ghosts of those who snatched a crown from that massacre, and fled up here with it to hurl it into the tarn.

I pressed on. The sun was westering, Helvellyn's flank turning violet. I gained a saddle between two peaks, and saw the tarn just below. It lay in a shallow crater of grass and rock, jet-black under the mountain. Skirting it, I came presently on what I took to be a ruined fold. A V-shaped gash ran deep into the solid rock of the fell; across its mouth, twenty feet from where the two sides converged, lay a rough barrier of fallen stones as though a wall had once closed it. I paused by these; then a gruff voice spoke behind me: "Ya've a lang step doon t' pass, if ye're ga'n on inta Patterd'le?"

I sprang up, startled. The light was still good enough; I could have sworn the cleft was empty when I glanced in—yet he might have been where I saw him now, at its far end, between two ten-foot walls, with a lambstick across his ankles. He stood up and beckoned me: "Set here, lad—oot of t' wind!"

He was of that Norse type which lingers unmistakably in the fell country: gaunt, big-boned, yellow-haired, with eyes of a queer hard blue. "I—wasn't expecting you!" said I.

And he nodded. "Nay. It's lonely, this nebberhood."

He leaned against the rock-wall: and with a kind of truculent courtesy (I don't know how else to describe it) motioned me towards his seat. Still taken aback, I proffered my sandwiches.

He declined: "Ah doan't trouble fud, much."

The blue eyes stared at me. I felt uneasy: not on account of anything he had said (there is a blunt directness about Cumbrian

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speech which sounds like rudeness, to strangers) but because I remembered I had forty pounds in my breast-pocket, and because my breast-pocket seemed to be the focus-point of that fixed meditative stare.

Had there been even some slight emphasis in his remark: "I don't trouble *food* much?" And then I realized, quite suddenly, that our exchange of places had cut off my retreat. I said, casually as I could manage: "But I'm not crossing to Patterdale; I'm with friends, on the road."

"On t' Raise?" He nodded quietly. "That's a fair step an' all." His eyes had shifted, and were staring straight into mine—a little mockingly, as though he guessed my disquiet.

"None so far, if you're active," I said firmly. He made no comment, and I continued:- "I came up to look at the tarn."

"What for?" The eyes searched me.

"Well, since you're interested—" I began to resent his scrutiny: harmless, no doubt—the thought of footpads in a place like this was ridiculous—but what the devil did it matter to *him* why I'd come? "I've heard a tale: how a king's crown was chucked into the tarn after some old battle; and how his chaps' ghosts are supposed to fish it out, once a year—"

I thought: That settles you! You've asked, and you're answered; make what you can of it, and be damned . . .

He remarked, "Aye, that's reet. They still do."

"Do what?"

"Fish t' croon up. Ah've seed 'em at it, mony's the time."

"You've *seen* them? But that's only a tale—"

"Ya doan't hod wi't?"

"Of course not."

"Well then, what the hell fetched ya oop?" He shrugged, crossed leisurely towards the tumbled wall, and sat down on it; but he still kept between me and the open fellside, I saw.

His tone, though bantering, seemed more friendly; there was a gleam of humour in the frosty stare of those disquieting eyes. "Ye're fra Lunnon, likely? That's furder ner Ah've been, ner want to. Ah've heerd tell Lunnon folks has dug theirsel's whoals, so's they can scuttle to an' fro like rattens from yan end of t' toon till t' other?"

"Yes, that's true: the Underground—".

"Ah'll believe tha—though, mind, it tek's a dam' sight mair belief ner ony ghoast-tale hooivver. Ah'll believe't, if thoo tells it me; thoo an' me's nea call to swap lies." He leaned forward: "Noo, Ah'm tellin' *thee*: Ah've watched them heathen sojers fetch their croon oot o' theer—" And he jerked his head towards the tarn.

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I sat dumb. Till now, it had not crossed my mind that I'd a madman to deal with; but—need this chap be mad? Ghost tales are current in most corners of England. Besides, there was a crazy logic in his argument that defeated me; to an unbiased mind, the District Railway might be as phenomenal as any ghost that ever gibbered. I asked, presently: "Tell me just what you have seen?"

"Eh, nowt much to tell. There's a roon' dozen on 'em trails theirsel's up here ivvery year—slow, verra slow, like they was tire't oot; and when they've gitten t' croon, they're away off doon t' fell agen—but ya ken t' story? They rap on t' Carn wi' it; and t' oald boy tells 'em: 'Not yit! Tek' time, lads! Not yit—' In a hoor they're all back. Ya'll see t' croon flash, on a clear neet, when it's pitched intil t' watter. Plosh, it goes. This spot's grand fer watchin' 'em. But they're shy, soom way—aye, they give t' hoose a wide berth!"

I stared at him. The place was utterly desolate. "The house! Whose house?"

"Mine!"

His voice changed. He stood up, towering gauntly between me and escape. "Mine it is, an' mine it bides—aye, till t' Day of Judgmint!"

I grew suddenly most afraid. "There's no house here—"

"Ye're settin' on't—shaff, ye're welcome, let be! Nea fault of yourn if . . . him whease fault it was, he's in hell!" His voice rang harsh and menacing, as he stood there across the ruined wall that had once been a cottage, with the wild shoulder of Helvellyn beyond him and the setting sun in his eyes. "Oald tales, ye're after? Nay, Ah can give ya summat bitterer ner heathen battles an' sek-like!" His eyes blazed at me. "Ye've heerd tell o' John Grierson?"

I shook my head.

"When this hoose stood, it was his'n. There was a power o' smugglin' in the mountains, them days. They'd run their boatloads intil Ca'der River, wheer there'd be lads to lead 'em up Wasd'le—thirteen mile through the dark; then next neet, lads from Borrerd'le ud fetch 'em ower the gap, an' across t' fell to Waten'lath; and the third neet be Dunmail Carn an' past here into Patterd'le. It's a lang step though, fra Waten'lath to Patterd'le on a mucky mid-winter neet; so if t' wedder turn't rough . . ."

He broke off, and looked at me knowingly. "Ah'll say nea mair ner this: on rough neets, Grierson slept heavy! There'd be a trampin' in his dreams, mebbe, and the smell of a lantern; an' in t' marnin', piled agen yon wall wheer his bed wasn't,

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two-three dozen packs wi' rope slings. T' packs 'ud bide theer all day, while Grierson went aboot his affairs—he'd got his sheep on the fell—an' left his door locked ahint him.

"Next neet he'd dream of trampin' feet agen; and coom dawn, packs 'ud be gone . . . But he tuk dam' good care he nivver waked from sek a dream, didn't Grierson: ner saw nea faces; ner he didn't reckernize ony voice. And when he did wake, it 'ud be broad day, and not a Christian in sight, an' a gowd piece left on t' table."

"But smuggling's dead—" I exclaimed.

The fierce pale eyes stared at me. "There's a gey lock o' things that's reckon't deid still goes on hooivver."

"This must have been a long time back?"

"Lang eneuf. What's time hereaboots? T' mountains doan't change . . . John Grierson did nin too bad. Mony's the hunnerdwet o' stuff that's bin stacked oop wheer you're set, mester. Salt they'd fetch ower; brandy fra t' Isle o' Man; Scotch whisky fra Galloway.

"He'd a clay pot o' gowden guineas beneath this floor, had Grierson. Aye! Thoo med say he was miserly; or thoo med put it he foreseed the day he'd be ower oald to graze sheep. But for a' them gowd guineas he'd pang't oop, he nivver liv't to enjoy them—" The eyes burned at me, menacing; a nameless fear held me still.

"Yan neet John Grierson dreamt the last of his dreams; and the next time t' lads coom by, sheep had gitten a new mester, —eh, nea questions axed! It was a' t' same to them, they left their guineas hooivver; but it wasn't Grierson collectit 'em."

I asked unsteadily; "What happened to Grierson, then?"

And for a moment he stood glowering down at me, with contempt and mockery in his eyes. He jeered: "Hoo, min, thoo's nin so bright! Ah'll tell thee what happen't Grierson—a lambstick through his windpipe! A stick like this yan, it was—"

He raised it suddenly, so that I saw the wicked-looking spike at the end; if he had plunged it into my neck that instant, I believe I could not have stirred.

"Grierson had nobbut stepped oot till t' tarn wi' his bit kettle—roond sunset, near eneuf the time o' neet it is noo—when this wild feller slipped doon until t' hoose from a moss whoal wheer he'd bin hid. Black-dark inside t' door . . . so when Grierson showed clear agen the light he got stick in his gullet. And then heid-doon until a moss-whoal; and some rocks an' sods on the top. That's what happen't *him*!"

I recoiled, sick. "But if this wasn't found out—"

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"Fun' oot?" he echoed sombrely. "What way'd it ivver be fun' oot, in a spot like this spot—thoo fool?"

"But *you* knew, you—"

"Ah'd good reason."

"Then you—?" Fear left me, or some sharper agony drove it out. I leapt up with a cry. I had my stick—less stout than his, but I was far past thinking of that. I sprang towards him. He gave ground. Next moment, yelling incoherently, I was in hot pursuit as he fled from me up the naked slope of the fell. But his long shambling shepherd-trot outdistanced me easily; I pulled up. He glanced round: stopped likewise, and returned towards me, three or four steps.

I called out: "You keep your distance! I'm going back. This time tomorrow you'll be laid by the heels!"

I feared him no more: his headlong flight had snapped the spell which those uncanny eyes seemed to lay on me, and I felt nothing but rage. Yet I was near enough to see their glance bent on me angrily, as he answered.

"Tek' time! Whee t' hell d'ya think ye're talkin' till?"

"I know who I'm talking to! You've told me yourself. You're Grierson's murderer—that's who!"

He stood there motionless, looking down at me—ten yards off, on the bare open fellside with no cover at all. His eyes still blazed; yet when he spoke at last, his voice was no longer truculent, but thin and fading like a distant cry from high hills. He said: "Ye're wrang, lad. Ah'm Grierson . . ."

And vanished before I could speak.

★ ★ ★

ANSWERS to MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME on page 20

1. *The Starkadders, dominated by Aunt Ada Doom at Cold Comfort Farm, in the novel of that title by Stella Gibbons.*
2. *The Crummleses in "Nicholas Nickleby," by Charles Dickens.*
3. *Petruchio, in Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew."*
4. *Sherlock Holmes, in "The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes," by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.*
5. *The Darling family, in "Peter Pan," by J. M. Barrie.*
6. *The Prozorovs, in the play, "Three Sisters," by Anton Tchehov.*
7. *The Beste-Chetwyndes of King's Thursday, in "Decline and Fall," by Evelyn Waugh. Peter was the studious son.*
8. *The Buccleuchs of Branksome Hall, in "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," by Sir Walter Scott.*

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THE STORY OF

ESTHER COSTELLO

by NICHOLAS MONSARRAT

TRUSTFULLY, with no more hesitation, Esther began to tell Barry Grant her story. She talked steadily and bravely for a long time, with her hand clasped in his hand, except when he strode the room in rage and torment, and her eyes holding his, save when he could no longer bear to meet them. This was what she told him, and what she implied, and what he guessed at: this was the missing part of her fearful history.

It was force, Esther said again, with a submissive determination which Barry Grant found cruelly moving—as if, unreassured, he might come to the conclusion that she had made a freewill offering of her body. It was force; and for a long time afterwards she lay like a flower cut down, while around her the London household hummed like some noisome piece of carrion.

There were plans to be made, arrangements to be altered or abandoned. To begin with, the Australian trip, said Mrs. Bannister, must be postponed.

"What do you mean—*postponed*?" asked Jack Lett, to be met by a look from Mrs. Bannister so complicated and stealthy that he let the question lie unanswered. He had much to lose by a public confession that Esther was no longer abnormal in any way; he hoped for some fortunate outcome; and after meeting Mrs. Bannister's glance he trusted her to find it.

He had come to rely on Mrs. Bannister in a great number of ways; this, might be yet another of them. She herself was in turmoil: pity, rage, and fear held her enchained. She could not believe that even Charles Bannister would have done so fearful a thing. She was wildly jealous, although she had not cast a glance in his direction for months and knew that he must have been totally drunk to have thus entered the lists of love.

But above all she was possessed with fear—fear that the story would leak out, fear that everything would now be lost, and that all her hard work and self-dedication, all the riches that the future had promised them, would come to naught. Mrs. Bannister had

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Esther Costello, a young Irish girl, blind, deaf, and dumb since a childhood accident, is taken to America in the hope of a cure, by a wealthy Bostonian, Mrs. Bannister. The case arouses great sympathy, particularly in a young reporter, Barry Grant. But medical treatments fail. Through Mrs. Bannister's loving patience, Esther is taught to communicate in deaf-and-dumb language, and they give meetings, at which money is collected for Esther and for the blind.

When Mrs. Bannister's ne'er-do-well husband reappears the situation changes. With the help of Jack Lett, a manufacturer of novelties, and by blackmailing his own wife, Captain Bannister takes charge, and "promotes" Esther into an international figure, the centre of a charitable racket as shady as it is profitable.

Esther has grown into a radiantly lovely girl of nineteen, and he finds her physical attractions irresistible. In London, on their world tour, Bannister seizes his opportunity, and against all codes of human decency, violates the helpless girl. The shock of this outrage restores Esther's sight, hearing, and speech.

After delay, the Bannisters continue the world tour. Deception is maintained: money pours in for the blind Esther. Barry Grant covers their home-coming and accompanies them in New York. His admiration for Esther flowers into love—but alongside his increasing devotion grows a deep suspicion that Esther is involved in an appalling fraud. Gaining secret access to her room, he tells her of his love. The hideous mask of silence and deception is lifted as Esther confesses her love for him.

The Fourth (and last) Part opens as she begins her story.

★

never been a predominantly greedy woman, but she was certainly, by now, an ambitious one; success had hardened and enlarged her will, and (mindful of the past) she was seeking also an impregnable financial security.

Having gone far towards attaining it, having in the process

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been accorded a mantle midway between celebrity and saint, having worn it with assurance for years on end, she could not give up her position without a frenzied struggle.

Such were her thoughts, such her aching desire, as she considered what to do next. When she had said to Jack Lett that the Australian tour must be "postponed," she had not really considered how the trip could ever be undertaken at all. Esther was in the doctor's hands—a doctor so obscurely skilled, so dubious, so marginal, that there had been no need to swear him to secrecy: she had recovered all her faculties: she now possessed, according to their standards, no assets at all. But Mrs. Bannister had said "postponed" instead of "cancelled," because she could not bring herself to surrender. The fat years, the years of homage and acclaim, had corrupted her too deeply. Somehow she must salvage the triumphant past, and build on it again.

The tour was accordingly put off "for at least three months:" they took over a house in the country, about fifty miles from London, and settled down in absolute obscurity. Esther, they gave out, was exhausted, by a schedule which had proved altogether too much for her strength. She must have complete rest. There could be no visitors, no interviews, no public contact at all.

Having thus taken care of the immediate problem, answered sufficient questions, and secured her breathing-space, Mrs. Bannister gave her mind to the future.

The small Buckinghamshire house was very quiet: the country noises, the distant traffic from the bypass road a mile away, barely reached within its walls. In a room at the top of the wide creaking stairway, Esther lay, absorbing all the riches of the world again.

Her body was healing, and she had much to enchant her eye and ear. It was astonishing how many things she had forgotten, in the ten years of darkness.

There were some sounds so delicate and alluring—like a bee at the honeysuckle that framed the window, or a cat mewing in the yard below—that she felt like laughing with joy at their emergence. There were some sounds so loud and violent—like an aircraft passing low over the house, or a man shouting at some animal—that she was ready to weep at their ugliness. There were some things so strange to see again—like food, or a mirror—that they frightened her: there were things so welcome—like Mrs. Bannister, and the bars of sunlight moving across the wall—that joyful laughter came near to her heart once more.

To begin with, it was a happy time: learning to see, learning to hear, learning to speak again. She saw Mrs. Bannister and Jack Lett nearly every day. They would come up to her room, together or alone, and talk to her: telling her of outside happenings, answering her eager questions. Gradually she was brought up to date with the missing time—and especially the last few years, when the successive triumphs had begun, and grown. She knew already what Mrs. Bannister had done for her; but what

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Esther herself had been able to do for other people, the total love and faith she had called forth—these were new things she had never fully comprehended before, things that now made her proud and happy.

Yet there came a day when Mrs. Bannister began to talk of less agreeable matters. "All the work you used to do," she said to Esther one evening, when they were alone together in the sitting-room downstairs: "all the meetings, and the money we collected—they did such a lot of good for the blind."

"Yes, you told me—and I'm glad," said Esther happily. "But you should be very proud, too. It was all your work, wasn't it?"

"It was *our* work," corrected Mrs. Bannister. "Neither of us could have done anything without the other . . . It seems a terrible pity," she went on, picking at the linen cover of her armchair, "that everything must come to a stop now. The blind will suffer, all over the world."

She continued for some time in the same strain, persuasive yet never insistent, until Esther, feeling vaguely guilty, said: "But couldn't we go on, in some way? Go on talking, and collecting money?"

Mrs. Bannister shook her head. "It wouldn't be the same thing at all. In the old days, people came to the meetings and gave money, because you were so blind and helpless, and so clever at the same time. That was what reminded them of all the other blind people, and made them want to help. Now there'll be no feeling like that left."

Esther said nothing.

"Even the toys and games and dolls," said Mrs. Bannister, filling the pause, "will be no good now. Even the Club won't make sense any more. The name Esther Costello won't mean anything to anyone, as soon as people know that you can see and talk. It means the end of all that. I'm afraid Jack Lett will just have to fold up."

"But aren't you glad?" asked Esther uncomfortably. "I know it was a terrible thing that it should happen that way"—she blushed vividly, and shivered at the same time—"but it means—it means everything to me."

"Of course, darling!" Swiftly Mrs. Bannister reassured her. "It's everything to me, too. But you can see what a difference it will make, as soon as we tell people."

"Don't they know already?" asked Esther. "Haven't you told anybody?"

"No," said Mrs. Bannister. "I've been ashamed to."

"You mean"—Esther felt herself flushing again—"because of—of your husband?"

"Oh, no!" answered Mrs. Bannister. Her hands were busy again. "*He* doesn't matter. It's you I worry about."

"How do you mean?"

"It's such a terrible thing to have to tell people, about any girl. I've wanted to keep it a secret."

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"But it wasn't my fault," said Esther, now somewhere near weeping.

"Of course. *We* know that. But it's not an easy thing to convince people about, honey. You know what they always think—*and* say . . . If only we didn't have to tell anything about it. But never mind!" she ended brightly. "We'll find some way of fixing it."

That was the first of many such talks: some ended on a hopeful note, some in tears, some near to open disapproval. Mrs. Bannister, forecasting the future for Esther's benefit, set out, step by step and mood by mood, to produce as many different ideas as possible, and to ring the changes on them with remorseless skill. There were many sections to this varied tapestry, many subtle contrasts of light and shade. There was the loss to the blind, the loss to Jack Lett, the loss to herself—and above all, the shame of confession. Without doubt, Mrs. Bannister had promising material to work on. Esther was a young and simple girl, just emerging into the normal world for the first time, in circumstances of the utmost horror: she had been totally dependent on Mrs. Bannister—dependent for sight, sound, and voice—for years on end: she loved this strong woman who now seemed so unhappy. Sometimes Esther could hardly bear to watch her distress, so deep and abiding was her gratitude for the past, so lively her sense of obligation.

Mrs. Bannister and Jack Lett were very close to one another. Indeed, on many occasions they were in a position to talk in intimate darkness.

"I think she's coming round to it, Jack. Something tells me it's going to be O.K."

"It's still the trickiest thing I ever heard of, Belle. Even if she does agree to it, she'll have to learn the whole routine over again. *And* make it look as convincing as it used to be."

"She'll do that . . ."

"Suppose there's some slip-up?"

"There'll be no slip-up . . . As soon as Esther agrees, we'll really go into training."

"You must have been doing some fast talking."

"Yes. And it had better be left to me, from now on. I know all the angles, and she's very fond of me."

"Even so, there can't be so many arguments to use."

"Oh, there's a lot to be said for carrying on, the way we used to do. Esther knows already how much good we did for the blind."

"You're a wonderful woman, Belle. I've always thought so."

"And there's another thing," said Mrs. Bannister to Esther. "There's the police."

"The police?" Esther looked at her in alarm: the word to her conveyed only guilt and crime, a man with a gun stalking a murderer down the length of the village street. "What's it to do with them?"

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" You see, we haven't yet told them about you and Charles. That was an illegal thing he did. We could get into trouble for not telling them about it."

" But it wasn't my fault," said Esther. Already she had used the words many times. " You know that well."

" I'm afraid it makes no difference. In fact, it makes it worse. It makes two crimes instead of one."

" Two crimes ? "

" What Charles did to you was a crime. And not to tell about it was a crime. If we confess it now, there'll be no end to the trouble."

" But what can we do, then ? "

" What I said last night. Say nothing. Behave as if nothing had happened."

" But I don't understand. How can we do that ? "

" I've explained the idea to her," said Mrs. Bannister to Jack Lett, in the warm darkness of the bedroom.

" What did she say ? "

" She said she was afraid."

" Her and me both! If we ever get found out! "

" We won't be found out."

" You'll have to train her, Belle. Train her like for the Olympic Games."

" As soon as she agrees, I'll start."

" She hasn't said yes, then ? "

" No. That's tomorrow."

Power, greed, and vanity were at the core of Mrs. Bannister's hard determination; against them, Esther Costello—young, frightened, ashamed—had nothing to set save her isolated will; and this had been softened and eroded far in advance, by the years of dependence, the years of love.

" You *must* trust me, Esther. I tell you, this is the only way."

" But it's so terrible. And so difficult. I don't think I could ever manage it."

" After all I've done for you," said Mrs. Bannister.

" Ah, I know that! But I'm not clever enough for it."

" You just don't want to do it."

" I do, I do! But I can't! "

" After all I've done for you," repeated Mrs. Bannister. " Rescued you, brought you up, spent all those years looking after you, teaching you, acting as your eyes and ears, giving up everything for you. And now this . . . It's no good crying, Esther," she said grimly. " The time for tears is long past. You should have thought of all the consequences, before you and Charles——"

" But he forced me," said Esther, with desperate unhappiness.

" Whichever way it happened, it happened. Now you can see and hear—and as a consequence we're all ruined. It's a fine return for all I've done."

" But the other thing is cheating," said Esther.

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"It's not. It's helping the blind. And me. And Jack Lett."

"And I've only just started to see and hear."

"That will make it easier. There's less for you to forget."

"It's O.K., Jack," said Mrs. Bannister. "She's going to do it. We start tomorrow."

"What's the routine?" asked Jack Lett. "You mean, she's got to learn *not* to see and hear again?"

Mrs. Bannister nodded. "Yes. And we can help her, too, in lots of ways. With ear-plugs, maybe. And we might have to work out something for her eyes, unless she can really make them go blank, of her own accord. We might even——"

"What?"

"Some kind of operation. It depends if she can't do it all on her own account, by pretending." Mrs. Bannister sighed in the darkness, and murmured: "It's not as if she were losing it all for the first time. It wouldn't be as bad for her as for ordinary people. And we want it to be completely foolproof."

"You're a wonderful woman, Belle. I guess I'll leave it all to you."

The next few weeks were the most miserable that Esther Costello had ever known, in a life which had held far more than its due share of inhumanity and pain.

Esther was doing what she was told, for love of Mrs. Bannister, to whom she owed every single thing in her life. She was doing it also for the blind, who would suffer, all the way round the world, unless she continued to work for them. She was doing it for poor Jack Lett, who had sunk so much money in his various agencies and factories, and would be ruined if the Esther Costello Club and all the other affiliations had to be disbanded. She was doing it because of the police, whom, in her ignorance, she saw as continuously hunting for her, unless she could conceal the crime she had shared with Charles Bannister. She was doing it for shame—the shame of a shy and completely innocent girl who had to confess to a huge public that she had been raped by a man of fifty-five.

She was doing it because she was facing, alone and without allies, the most formidable barrage of persuasion she had ever known in her life.

As a preliminary, Dr. Worthington came to live in the house.

He was a small, off-white man whose nervous over-the-shoulder manner was doubtless well grounded in the past. He was about fifty, with plump hands and a suppliant smile; his papers—at least, the papers he carried with him—showed that he had practised as a dental surgeon in Cyprus, a gynæcological consultant in Tangier, and a neurologist in Cannes. He gave his name as Worthington. He seemed to be Egyptian.

The hour produced the man, and this, without doubt, was a vile hour.

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Dr. Worthington's role was executive: he was to bend his talents towards the physical re-handicapping of Esther, supplementing Mrs. Bannister, whose sphere was re-education in sensory anæsthesia. It was, of course, essential that, whenever she was under the public eye, Esther should never betray herself: the loud noise, the sudden light, the wish to respond to some special kindness or acclaim—these must never be allowed to make any impression on her. Much could be done by training, by schooling Esther—as is done with police horses—to ignore any outside manifestation; but to aid in thus dulling her senses, Dr. Worthington, who was of an inventive turn of mind, weighed in with a number of experiments.

It was not possible to make Esther completely deaf again, but by means of ear-plugs she could be rendered abnormally hard of hearing, so that she became disinclined to listen to people talking. She could not be made blind; but an ingenious form of contact lens, clear when viewed from the outside, opaque when looked through from within, ensured that she saw almost nothing of the outside world, while to the spectator her eyes appeared to be still unclouded. Complete dumbness, to avoid the danger of her answering questions when caught off her guard, was not possible to achieve without the sort of operation which Mrs. Bannister still shrank from; but Dr. Worthington was able to perfect a form of injection which, by constricting the inner muscles of her throat, made speech painful for a number of hours afterwards.

These things were simply aids to training—the training which Mrs. Bannister instilled into her, day after day, and which gradually she came to accept, with a hopeless resignation that was perhaps the most effective frame of mind for what they planned to do with her.

"She's ready, any time," answered Mrs. Bannister. "Don't you think so, Doctor?"

Dr. Worthington lowered the gold-plated, miniature scissors with which he had been trimming a cuticle, and creased his face into a smile. "She is as ready as she will ever be." He had a pronounced lisp. It might have been endearing. It was not. "The girl is well trained, and"—he waved a fleshy hand—"the little arrangements I have made will keep her out of trouble."

There was a slight sound behind them, and they all turned. It was Esther. She stood in the doorway between the house and the porch, groping with uncertain fingers for the edge of the frame. She looked as she had always done in the past: young, fresh, startlingly beautiful—and helpless. She was staring at them, and not seeing them at all.

"Come in, honey," said Mrs. Bannister. "We were just talking about you."

Esther gave no sign that she had heard a single sound. She continued to stand there, her fingers grasping the door-frame, considering the hazards of the next step. It was clear that she was

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wearing Dr. Worthington's full regalia, and that because of this she was Esther Costello again.

Much heartened, and with an interested look on his face, Jack Lett, who was nearest to her, reached out and tapped Esther on the arm. Her start of surprise and shy confusion was as good as anything they remembered from earlier, happier days.

Mrs. Bannister turned to Dr. Worthington. "Congratulations, Doctor," she said warmly. "You've done a fine job. I don't see that we need to worry over anything."

On that long tour, covering thousands of miles and scores of crowded meetings, Esther really did very well. It was true that all her audiences were uniformly on her side, and had come there especially to acclaim her; but they were sharp-eyed human beings as well as disciples, and they would have been quick to notice anything odd or suspicious in what she or Mrs. Bannister did. Esther must have been stared at, examined, appraised, touched, watched, and hailed by a quarter of a million people, in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, and the United States: she had to appear on platforms, at parties, on balconies, in the streets, at missions and institutions and schools: she had to give a flawless public performance, without respite, for six months on end.

In the whole of this time, with all its dangers and crises and chances of disaster, she made only two discernible slips.

The first was in Christchurch, New Zealand. There, she was received privately by the Archbishop, and afterwards, accompanied by His Grace, she faced an audience of four hundred school-children and a battery of Press cameramen. The hall in which she appeared was somewhat gloomy: the flash-guns, when they exploded in quick succession, had therefore an unexpected and dazzling brilliance.

This may have taken her by surprise: or it may have frightened her: or it may have been too much for Dr. Worthington's strange lenses. But a photograph in the *Christchurch Courier* next day showed Esther with her hand on a small child's head, and her eyes tightly shut.

The occasion had been religious. "She must have been praying," said the more devout readers. "How very sweet."

"You know," said the man who took the photograph, later, "if it wasn't a silly idea, I'd say that she was waiting for my flash-gun, and she blinked."

The second mistake was more serious, because it involved a definite, observed action on Esther's part, which could only be explained by the fact that she could see perfectly well. But luckily it took place in South Africa, and the only witnesses were confused and inarticulate natives whom no one treated seriously in any case.

There could be no consequences to so ill-attested a mishap: in a sense, there had been no witnesses to it at all, and the occasion died as soon as it was born.

Soon afterwards, their party moved on to Cape Town, en route for

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Canada and the States, and the tour resumed its triumph—and, for Esther, its fearful ordeal. She had no friend to talk to, no one in whom to confide: she bore it all alone, drilled into total submission, earning thanks and plaudits by a performance always fraudulent, watched from morning till nightfall not only by huge crowds of strangers, but by those near her who loved her so dearly.

The hundreds of crowded miles, the thousands of clamant people, unwound before and after her, completing the blank spaces of a pattern foredoomed to success. There were no more slips, no more incidents save the expected, acceptable ones, the ones that fell within the world-tour routine, suiting the newsreels, delighting the Press. There was the small child at Cape Town that refused to surrender its bouquet: the young man in Quebec who tried to climb into her room—"to offer her a donation," the papers quickly added; the old lady in Chicago who handed over to Esther her entire life-savings, crammed into a much-photographed stocking.

These were the formal oddments that people looked for, and they were not disappointed. But there was nothing more serious, nothing out of line, nothing crucial—however much Esther, forlorn and hopeless, might have prayed for disaster to overtake her. She did not dare to fail on purpose: that was a conviction ever present, looming above her every hour of every day.

Though there were many times—after the South African visit was one of them—when the whole thing seemed to have become too wicked for her, too dangerous, too disgusting, and she begged to be allowed to give it up, yet her prayers died always on the margin of her lips, unacknowledged, ignored, falling into defeated silence, like faint torture-cries lost behind walls of monstrous thickness, unplumbable depth.

Mrs. Bannister would not hear a word on the subject, and, meeting those level, competent, masterful eyes, Esther knew that she could never make a move of her own accord.

She remained, to the end, a prisoner isolated at the core of a huge swindle: alone, dishonoured, beyond hope of rescue or redemption. When Barry Grant had entered her room, and spoken to her in the knowledge that she could hear him, it had meant to Esther something more than the overturning of the heart in love. It was her first honest contact with the world she had mourned and coveted, for more than ten years.

IT was very late when Esther finished—so late that for the last hour Barry Grant had had his ear cocked for the sound of the outer door, the return of Mrs. Bannister. But they were left alone, in their uneasy, magical peace.

It was very late, and Esther was tired and overwrought; when Barry said to her, at the end: "Come away with me—now," he did not really think that she should agree. There was nowhere

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for them to go; most of the hotels would be full, and he did not like the idea of their wandering about for half the night in search of shelter, with Esther near the limit of exhaustion, and likely to be recognized by a hotel-clerk or a taxi-driver, with all the complications that might follow.

She sat now on the edge of her bed, staring at him with shadowed, enormous eyes: even in tiredness, she was lovely, but it was a loveliness so frail and vulnerable that he knew he must not tax it further. She had cried once during her story, when she had told him of the last plea she made for deliverance, to Mrs. Bannister; he had lent her a handkerchief, and quickly she had mastered her tears, and gone on with what she was telling him. But there must be no more tears that night, no more strain upon her.

When he said, again: "Come away, Esther," she had nodded.

"Of course, Barry. You must take me away from all this. You'll look after me well, I know. But tomorrow, not tonight."

"But will you be all right, Esther?" He stood up, a deep frown on his face, and looked down at her. "It's such a horrible story—the worst I ever heard. Will you be all right, here alone?"

She nodded again. "For tonight, yes. Nothing can happen. I'll say nothing to her."

"And tomorrow?"

Esther smiled enchantingly. "Tomorrow will all be different. Tomorrow is *our* day, Barry. I'll talk to her, and then we can be together."

"I'll come and fetch you," he said. "What time?"

"I'll call you. I've been longing to use the telephone. Where will you be?"

Barry Grant hesitated. "At the paper, I guess. There's this story . . . What shall I do about it, Esther? It will all have to come out."

"You write it," she said. "Write everything."

"There's no way round it."

"I know," she said. "Write it—write it for me. And then we can be happy."

"I love you, Esther."

"Always do that." She held out her arms, and he bent and kissed her gently. "And always do *that*."

"Go to bed now," he said. "And take care of yourself. If you like, *I'll* talk to her in the morning."

"No," said Esther. "I want to do it. There are some things I have to say, good things as well as hard things. There was a time when she was everything to me. You begin writing the story, and suddenly you'll hear my voice on the telephone."

He smiled. "There's a thing to look forward to." Then he kissed her again, repeating: "Take care of yourself, Esther," and made towards the door and the fire-ladder. He turned for a last look at her: she was still sitting on the bed, smiling at him, but drooping now on the very edge of exhaustion. It came to him then that there would be other times when he would love her, when

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she would be strong or drowsy in his naked arms; but at that moment he loved her very much, without further need.

Barry Grant was never wholly clear how he spent the rest of that night. It was past one o'clock when he got back to his car, but he was as far from sleep as he had ever been: the turmoil of his thoughts, the mingled love and pity, the enormous challenge of the story he must write, all burned inside his brain unceasingly.

By now, it was too late for him to return to the paper; his story would have to keep until morning. But there was no danger of its disappearing. He went downtown first, for a drink at an all-night bar off Boylston Street; then he started driving, far along the coast road towards Scituate Beach, then inland in a great circle through wooded country and lonely moors, then back to Boston with the dawn coming up on his right hand, and a wild thirst nagging him again.

It was not a night for drunkenness, and he did not get drunk. But the thoughts within his skull were heady and chaotic enough; and as the hours of that night went by, he might well have been drunk, so wayward, downcast, and exalted did he become by turns.

Esther's was the worst story he had ever heard; and to tell it was the worst task he had ever been faced with. He knew that she must suffer abominably in the telling, and in the dark future also. But it was there to be told: Esther wanted it to be told: he himself was to tell it; and it had to be told absolutely right—as Ryan had said, so many hours ago—if the whole vile tangle were to come out straight.

As he drove, the phrases started queuing up in his head: strong, authentic, matchless phrases, snatched out of the air, composed from shadow and ether, like Beethoven, like God.

Back at the all-night bar, he lost them again—but there were always other phrases, only waiting to be snatched and lured from the infinite: lucid strings of them, clearer, more concise, more exact and vivid all the time, making up a story that would go round the world in explicit triumph.

Esther Costello—The Truth, he said to himself—or it might have been aloud, for the yawning barman frowned at him over the top of his newspaper. He swallowed a last drink, and went out into the cold deserted street, lit now by pale shadowless light from the east. Then he drove to the *Star-Telegram*, doused his head in cold water, washed and straightened up, and sat down at his typewriter in the empty city room. The very act of taking the cover off the machine, and reaching for a wad of paper, was like the prelude to some fantastic play, which he was to write and to watch at the same time.

He typed: "COSTELLO. One. Grant," and drew a deep breath.

Immediately, lavishly, the magic words began to tumble from the air again, slipping within his brain, coursing down his arms, leaking into freedom and triumph from his fingers poised above the keys.

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Towards nine o'clock that morning, when he was halfway through, the room around him started to fill up: the cleaners came and went, the copy-boys began a slow version of the activities which would later rise to a bustling inter-office crescendo; the men who had spent the night in the various police precincts scuffed their way in, bleary-eyed and resigned to human frailty: the morose characters condemned to cover openings and lectures assembled for their day's assignments. Barry Grant, sitting preoccupied at his desk, was widely greeted, mostly on a caustic note.

He smiled automatically at each greeting, but none of it interrupted him or threw him out of his stride; he felt supremely confident—light-headed with the sleepless night, exalted by the outpouring of words. His hands were composer's hands, tapping out on the keyboard a flowing, cascading masterpiece.

By the time that Ryan, the news-editor, came in, Barry was nearly through. The pile of sheets lay on his desk, seeming to promise to him and to Esther a complete and blessed release, as soon as they were finished.

Ryan paused by his desk. "How did you make out, Barry?"

"Fine." Barry Grant gestured. "It's all here."

"You saw her? She talked?"

"Yes."

"Good boy . . . How are you writing it?"

"News item—then the back history—then the why and where—then what we think about it."

Ryan grinned. "What do we think about it?"

Grant stared up at him. "We think it wasn't her fault," he said, levelly. "We think she was forced into it. We think she's O.K."

"Funny thing," said Ryan. "That's just what we were thinking. Bring it in when it's ready."

Presently the last half-page was pulled from the typewriter and Barry Grant started to read back what he had written, and to correct it. There was little for him to change: the story had come out smooth, accurate, persuasive, just as he had felt it, just as he had hoped. It was Esther's whole story—Esther the idol of millions, Esther the dupe and martyr, Esther whom no one could love one whit the less for what she had been made to do.

Then there was a stir at the main door opposite the elevator, and a man—a reporter called Sparrow—came in, walking briskly, almost running, making for the glass enclosure that was Ryan's office. Barry Grant, still intent on his last few paragraphs, looked at him briefly as he approached and drew level. Opposite his desk, not stopping, Sparrow called out something from the corner of his mouth.

It was a single sentence; it sounded like: "Your girl-friend's dead." But it couldn't be that. Nor could it be important. Barry bent his head to the pages again.

The last sentence ran smoothly, as everything about the story had run smoothly, once he had begun to write from the true, un-

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tricked-out centre of his heart. He altered a few final words, scored out something about "the judgment of the Almighty," which sounded false—and liable to usurp the functions of the *Star-Telegram's* readers—and gathered the sheets together. It was long, detailed, definitive: it was the Esther Costello story, as nearly as any one human being could get it.

Then he became aware that someone was standing by his side, and someone else in front of him, straight across the carriage of his typewriter. He half raised his head, still preoccupied. The man beside him was Sparrow, the reporter who had just come in; the man in front was Ryan.

Barry looked straight up, to meet Ryan's eyes. He smiled vaguely, smoothing a cold bristly chin, wishing he could smooth his slightly fluttering brain at the same time. He said: "It's all finished."

Ryan said: "Hold it, Barry."

Sparrow said: "She just died."

Barry Grant turned his head, seeing Sparrow properly for the first time. He knew the other man slightly—a young, tough, unshockable reporter who covered a lot of ground around Boston, and whose best connections were with the police. Sparrow was looking at him speculatively, as if he knew he had a good story and wanted to gauge its effect upon Grant. But whether it went well or not, the *Star-Telegram* would certainly print it.

Barry said foolishly: "That was what you said when you passed my desk."

Sparrow nodded, unconcerned. "Sure, Barry," he said. "I know what you did for her. It just came through."

Barry turned back to Ryan. Already he knew that he must cope with this, and that it was about to crash down upon his head with fearful weight. He could only remain foolish, and simple, and hidden, for a very little while longer.

By way of prolonging it, he pointed to the typewritten sheets on the edge of the desk, and said: "I finished the story."

Ryan looked at him with compassion. "Hold it, Barry," he repeated. "This is something else again . . . We just got word—" He jerked his head at Sparrow. "Esther was found dead this morning. About an hour ago."

The time to cope was nearly at hand. "You're crazy!" Barry burst out. "I was with her myself, a couple of hours ago!"

Ryan's eyes sharpened. "*How* long ago?"

God, thought Barry: that's another angle to it. He swallowed, and said: "Longer than that. I was driving around all night. I left about one o'clock."

"Was she all right then?"

"Of course she was all right." He groped for a firmer hold on what was going on. "What's the story? What happened?"

"Police report." That was Sparrow, telling about his friends and their routine discoveries. "She was found dead in bed this morning. Overdose of sleeping tablets."

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Barry swallowed again. "How?"

"Accident, maybe." There was an infinitely long line of accidents in Sparrow's voice. "Or suicide." There was another long line of suicides, mostly with guns or disinfectant. "What else could it be?" Sparrow was talking tiredly, unmoved by spectral deaths that boiled down to simple police reports. But he had one more thing to add. "She died some time between one and four."

Barry Grant stood up. There was a wild moment when he wished with all his might that he could confess to it, and so end his life with hers. But he said: "She was O.K. when I left."

Sparrow nodded. To him, this was straight witness stuff, either suspect or not suspect: the police would give the verdict on that. Dead girls always had fellows who'd left them a few hours before. He said: "She was blind. She must have reached for a bottle of something, and taken the wrong sort of pill."

"Is that the police angle?" asked Ryan.

"Yes."

"No!" said Barry. "I don't believe it!"

"You know something?" asked Sparrow immediately.

Barry shook his head. "No. But she wouldn't do that. She was too—too clever."

"You mean it was suicide?" There was another train of thought in Sparrow's voice, a minor variation: the girl who killed herself after the man left.

Ryan was staring at him. "Looks like an accident, Barry." His voice was almost pleading. "What else? She wouldn't commit suicide. And who in the world would kill her?"

"Mrs. Bannister," said Barry Grant.

Sparrow raised his thin eyebrows. "Now *there's* an angle. But why?"

Barry knew why: "why" was lying in front of him, enshrined in the thick wedge of typewritten sheets he had been working on for the past three hours. But the knowledge was not to be shared yet. He passed his hand over his eyes.

"I'll work it out," he answered. "Right now, it's all mixed up." He turned back to Ryan. "There's your story," he said, pointing. "Do you want it?"

Ryan shook his head. "It'll keep. You better go and see her."

"Her?"

"Mrs. Bannister."

"I could do that," said Sparrow.

"No," answered Ryan. "Barry."

"But the story," said Barry, persevering. "Don't you want it?"

"It'll keep," repeated Ryan. "Maybe for ever. Go and see her, Barry. And take it easy."

THERE were no crowds yet round the Commonwealth Avenue apartment, no pressmen in the lift, no photo-

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graphers with their thumb on the bell. Sparrow's police contact must be a very individual one.

Barry Grant, making his way to the top floor—using this time the formal approach, where a few hours before he had crept secretly up, and down, by the fire-escape—Barry Grant had few thoughts within his hollow brain. There was love, which he now knew must die. There was hatred, which would live for ever. And there was a fearful remorse that he had left Esther alone in the apartment, instead of taking her away that same night. He should have known that Mrs. Bannister, if ever she discovered what Esther planned, would never let her go; and she must have discovered it, as soon as she arrived.

He wondered how she had found out, but he did not have to wonder for long.

Mrs. Bannister herself opened the door. When the two of them were face to face, she stood looking at him for a long moment, not barring the way, not seeming to consider the possibility that he would want to come in. Finally she said, with the edge of a sneer in her voice: "Back again so soon? You've certainly got a nerve!"

Taken by surprise, he said: "What do you mean, 'back again?'"

She nearly smiled at him. "You left your handkerchief here. Initials and all. You as good as murdered her, Barry."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

Mrs. Bannister sprang to the attack, as clearly as if she had run up a flag. "Why did you creep in here last night? What did you do to her?" Her eyes were still meeting his, but they were perceptibly hardening, icing over. "You drove her to it. Or else you got her so worked up that she didn't know what she was doing. Either way, it's your fault—*your fault*!"

It was nothing like what he had expected—it could not have been farther from reality. He looked at Mrs. Bannister, utterly astonished, and saw her still standing in the doorway like a watching fury: a big woman, cold, commanding, in charge of this and of all other moments. It was as if, even though he entered the apartment, he would never get past her: she was the last opponent—like the death she masked—the last enemy who would always defeat him.

He felt confused, and his sleepless brain ticked and fluttered uncontrollably. He had come here to handle this with ice-cold logic, with quick, all-embracing observation—and already she had thrown him off balance, with a single look, a single counter-charge.

"I came up to see her last night," he said with difficulty. "I love her."

"Fine sort of love!" answered Mrs. Bannister scornfully. "Creeping in like a thief! What did you do to her? *And how could you love a girl who was blind and deaf and dumb?*"

She's not even giving *that* away, he thought. Suddenly despairing, he brushed past Mrs. Bannister, and walked into the living-room. It was deserted, and all the doors leading out of it were

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shut. The whole apartment had a peace about it—a suspect peace, a bitter silence. A few yards down the barred-off passage, where the silence was deepest and most bitter, Esther lay. His thoughts grew fanciful, toying with a phrase from the morbid air. Death's bony arms, clipped round her, had supplanted his own.

Mrs. Bannister followed him inside. "I don't know what you want here," she said hardly. "It's all finished now. The police have just gone. They think it was an accident. I didn't tell them anything different. I didn't say you'd been here. I didn't show them the handkerchief. I don't want a scandal."

There were two things, Barry thought, not listening to Mrs. Bannister's tirading nightmare voice, which was already assuming his futility and defeat. It could have been an accident, or it could have been murder. If Mrs. Bannister knew that he had been there, it was very likely to be the latter. But how did one make a start on that, when she held all the cards and was dictating the game?

"I did nothing," he said. He realized it was a mistake even to seem to be on the defensive, but he could not summon the wit to handle it in any better way. "You know that damned well!"

"I know nothing of the sort," answered Mrs. Bannister. She stood opposite him, growing tougher, harder, more triumphant every moment. "I know you crept in, and out again, and that Esther died—just about that time, or soon afterwards. Whatever happened between you, she took the wrong sort of sleeping-pills—the knock-out kind instead of the harmless ones—as soon as you left. Or did you force her to take them?" Her glance flickered like the exploring tongue of a snake. "Was that it? Did you have to keep her quiet, for some reason?"

"We talked," said Barry. "That was all."

"What do you mean, *talked?* You know she was deaf and dumb."

They were staring at each other, in the ultimate contest of wills. Total evil brushed him fleetingly, and then drew back, waiting to see what he would do.

"Esther could see and hear," he said.

"You must be crazy."

"We both know that she could."

"You're out of your mind."

"I talked to her."

"You dreamed it."

"When she told you that I knew, you killed her."

There was not a movement in Mrs. Bannister's face, save the curving of her grim lips as she spoke.

"You *are* out of your mind."

He summoned all his strength, all his failing enterprise, for a last assessment.

"You must have come back here, found my handkerchief, talked to Esther, realized that the story was going to break, and killed her."

There was still no movement in the bloodless, inhuman face.

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" I don't know why I'm listening to this—this raving," said Mrs. Bannister. " But *if* you want to know—*if* it's any good explaining—if you're not mad, or drunk, or covering up for yourself—when I came back here, Esther was already asleep. I didn't suspect she had taken those pills. Why should I ? They were ones I kept for when she had really bad spells, migraine. She was only allowed one. The handkerchief was lying on the bed. I left her as she was. She was dead this morning."

The silence between them lengthened intolerably. Each had used their weapons, and Mrs. Bannister's were carrying the day. Barry suddenly realized the reason for his approaching defeat; it was that Mrs. Bannister had had a margin of at least seven hours to figure out all these angles.

In one fearful corner of his brain, he even knew that she might be telling a conceivable aspect of the truth. Esther could not have taken the wrong pills because of her blindness, but it could still have been an accident—she had been so overwrought, so confused. Or it could have been suicide—if, on reflection, Esther had found that she could not face the world with her story.

But, whatever was the truth, he knew already that he would penetrate no farther, and must retreat now in shame and rout. Even his story was no good any more—he could prove nothing, effect nothing, change nothing. There was a dead girl called Esther Costello, whom all the world loved. What use to blacken her name, without evidence of any sort ? There was Mrs. Bannister, whom all the world knew as a saint and ministering friend. What good to bring these insane charges, when he would run into a blank wall almost before he started ?

Work it out, sap, he told himself, wearily, finally. Add it all up. She's dead, and the evidence is dead with her. There's no story any more. There's no nothing. The only thing out of tune is that Mrs. Bannister has no grief in her face—and *that* will be taken care of, by this afternoon at the latest. Work it all out, and quit. Quit now. You don't even want to see Esther. She isn't there any more. Death's arms have her, like you said to yourself.

" She could see and hear and speak," said Barry, in careful farewell. " We both know that. You probably killed her. Or she killed herself. Or it was an accident—not because she was blind, but because she was all worked up. I don't know. *You* know. But if I ever do find out—"

Mrs. Bannister continued to stand there, rock-like, unshakable. She shrugged slightly, to mark the wildness of his words. She gave the impression of bearing no malice.

He turned on his heel, unsteadily, and walked out of the apartment, leaving to her the mortal battlefield and the single corpse.

To his exhausted, wrung-out brain, there was an odd silence in the city room when he returned to it. It was nearly twelve o'clock—not a busy time, never a dead one; but it seemed to Barry Grant that he was entering a morgue.

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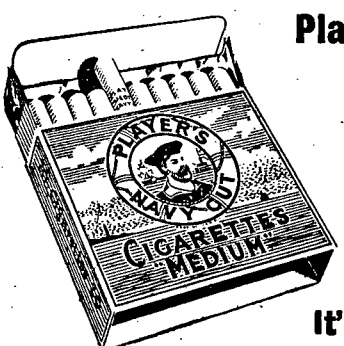

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He made his face firm, concealing his grief, and then realized that he was concealing nothing at all. Grief must be for tomorrow—it had not yet arrived.

Ryan was waiting for him, facing him across the broad desk—strong, experienced, prepared to deal with anything that came. Thank God, thought Barry, he need decide nothing for himself.

"Well, Barry?" said Ryan.

"I didn't get anywhere," Barry answered.

Ryan nodded, as if he had guessed that already. Then he said: "I read your story. Best you ever wrote."

"Mrs. Bannister killed her," said Barry. "I know she did."

"Any proof? Did she talk?"

"No. Not the way we wanted, that is. She had all the answers ready."

Ryan nodded again. "Then the thing's dead," he said, slowly "It's hell, but there it is. There's nothing left."

"Why?"

"Everything died with Esther. We've nothing to go on."

"We could still print it," said Barry.

Ryan shook his head. "It's no good. We've nothing to go on."

"There's still the money angle."

"How do you mean?"

"Even if we can't prove anything about Esther being able to see, or about how she died, there's still the money to be accounted for. All those collections and gifts—the whole racket. We could get Mrs. Bannister on that."

Ryan nodded. "Maybe. But what does that do to Esther?"

"She's beyond the scandal, beyond the reach of it."

"But her memory isn't."

"Who the hell cares about that?"

"A lot of people, Barry. Blind people. The people who look after them. The people who *really* collect money for them." Ryan glanced up swiftly. "And you yourself—you care."

Barry Grant swallowed. "It's still worth doing. Just to stop Mrs. Bannister. We wouldn't have much trouble proving it, either."

Ryan shook his head again. "There's no guarantee on that. You've got to remember, these Bannisters are smart. They'll cover up—they'll have cast-iron accounts for everything, *and* a lot of money in the bank, which they were just going to distribute. It wouldn't be an easy thing to pin them down. And look at the choice it gives us! If we win, Esther's name will stink, all the way round the world, and millions of blind people and their friends will feel miserable and frustrated and swindled. If we lose, we'll never sell another copy of this newspaper." He waited, watching Barry Grant's face. "The balance of things is weighted against us, Barry. We're bound to spoil more than we heal, much more."

"We'd stop *her*, anyway."

"We might—and destroy every good thing about Esther in the process. It's no good, Barry," Ryan said again. "We've got to kill it." There was a long pause.

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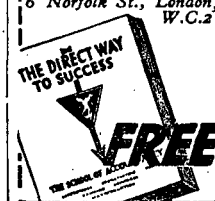

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"If only I hadn't left her alone," said Barry.

"I'm darned sorry," said Ryan. "About everything . . . It was a wonderful story, too." The typed sheets were on one side of Ryan's desk. On the other was the spike—bare now, ready for the day's rejects—the spike with NO printed on its base.

"Everything was wonderful," said Barry vaguely. He looked at Ryan. He wanted to talk for a few moments more. "Everything came right, last night. We—she was—we would have got married. It was as sure as that. I thought it would be all right to leave her."

"I'm darned sorry," repeated Ryan.

"But I left my handkerchief in the apartment. In Esther's room. Mrs. Bannister found it. She must have guessed what had happened."

Ryan shook his head again, this time in shared regret. But already his eyes were wandering—towards the telephone, the basket full of copy. He was waiting to become the news-editor once more, with the current deadline twelve hours ahead.

"She must have guessed," said Barry. He had one other thing to do, and he could only do it while he was talking. "She knew it was the finish, for her," he went on, reaching out for the spike with NO on the base, "and she took the only way out. Now she's in the clear again." He held the spike balanced in his hand for a moment, and then advanced it. "Sorry about the story," he said. "I really tried all I could, with that one." He put the spike down again, directly in front of Ryan, close alongside the typed pages. "But all the best stories—"

He turned without finishing the sentence, and began to walk out of the room. He found that his eyes were pricking. Perhaps grief was near at hand, after all. Ryan allowed his glance to follow the other man for a long moment, compassionately, before he reached out his own two hands, towards the story and the spike.

THE great Boston hall, the largest in the state, was crammed to the rafters; all tickets, indeed, had been sold out weeks before, and the rush when the doors opened had mirrored the traffic tie-up in all the nearby streets—a purposeful, close-packed, mainly silent crowd of people, converging on a single target. Many of them had been waiting outside for three and four hours: when the hall was opened, and they had surged into their places, they settled down again to wait with subdued, reverent patience for the meeting to start. It was not an ordinary crowd: there was over the whole vast concourse an air of dedication.

On the platform were seated, not only all the Guild trustees, but representatives of every religious and charitable body in the state. They waited, grave-faced, unsmiling, for Mrs. Bannister to appear; and down below in the packed hall the audience waited too—row upon row of them, and tier upon tier in the upper galleries of the hall. They talked in low tones; and just above the hum of voices, a string orchestra played gentle airs—not gay, not

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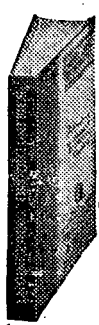

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sepulchral, but poised between the two, on a sustained note of comfort and charity.

All round the hall, and down each aisle, was ranged a guard of honour of children—the Tapalongs, in their green-and-white uniforms, and their white wands with the shamrock-shaped collecting-bags on the ends. But there was one essential difference: tonight, every child wore a broad black sash, draped across the breast in the manner of an English diplomat; and the white wands had small black bows tied round their handles. Many of the smaller children were already crying. They and the collecting-bags had been very busy, none the less.

It was the first memorial meeting in Boston for Esther Costello.

In the body of the hall, towards the back, near Barry Grant, two people were talking. They were a man and a woman, middle-aged, soberly dressed, wholehearted in their devout attention.

"Wonderful crowd here tonight."

"She deserved it, poor kid."

"Mrs. Bannister will be pleased."

"*She* deserves it, too. She gave up her whole life to Esther. And then to have it finish like that."

"She'll carry on, I guess."

"There's still plenty of work to do. For the blind."

"You could say it was blindness *killed* Esther, in the end."

"Easy to make a mistake, when you can't see and there's no one by."

"Terrible thing for Mrs. Bannister."

"Perhaps she'll tell us about it—share it with us."

"It might be a help to her."

"Have you got the ten dollars ready?"

"Yes. We'll give it at the end."

There was a vast sigh over the hall, growing and dying like the mutter of a storm a hundred miles away. "Here she is."

At the end of an hour, Mrs. Bannister still held her audience as if in chains. The single tall figure in the centre of the platform was the focus of an unwavering, hypnotic concentration: there was scarcely a movement in the hall, scarcely a cough, never a whisper. Everything about Mrs. Bannister aided this spell. She was dressed from head to foot in black: below the pale face, a black cape like a monk's, with a cowl at the shoulders, reached to the floor. She had a priestly air; and her voice had the same quality—insistent, commanding, certain of attention and belief.

"I have lost the dearest friend of my life, the dearest child," she said. Her motionless figure never wavered, never surrendered to grief; but the grief was in her voice and eyes, flowing down to the audience like an enveloping mist. "What you have lost is something different. You have lost Esther Costello—a symbol of the whole handicapped world, the centre of a great charitable enterprise. Here in her own town of Boston, she had a special place. I like to think that she had a special place in your hearts as well. In fact, I know she had that place, because of what you have done

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to help the helpless, because of what you gave to Esther during the past months and years, to pass on to other blind people.

"Now she has gone—this girl whom we loved so much, this poor child who touched all our hearts because she was so afflicted, who died because of that affliction—this girl who lost everything."

That was true! thought Barry Grant, half enthralled, half sickened by what he heard. Esther *had* lost everything: she had lost more than anyone in this whole audience, save himself, would ever know. She had lost speech, sight, and hearing: virginity, honour, and her own will. At the end, there had only been her life. The charmed, moving, useless phrases began to slide into his brain, creeping from the air, rustling like spiders: the phrases which he would never now set down, and which must go to waste even as they formed tormentingly within his mind.

"Because Esther is dead," said Mrs. Bannister, gathering the last threads, knitting the audience, and their generous grief, and the sombre evening together, feeling towards the certain climax, "we must make up our minds that nothing else must die. Because she is dead, we who are left behind must never stop carrying on her work. I gave up many years and much time to Esther—and I gave them gladly, willingly, because she was a wonderful child, and the work we were able to do together was wonderful also. That work must go on.

"You all know that this is a memorial meeting, the first of many such meetings all over the United States, all over the world. There are thousands of people in every country, waiting to hear about Esther, waiting to give their help towards what she stood for. I should like to see, as a result of these meetings, a temple for the blind and afflicted"—Mrs. Bannister seemed to correct herself—"a great chain of temples, girdling the earth, caring for those who cannot care for themselves, carrying Esther's message of hope and love to the farthest corners of the world.

"With God's help—and with yours—we shall see those temples, built and inhabited and doing their blessed work." There was tremendous determination in her voice. "And if anything I have said tonight advances that idea, that vision, one single foot on its way, then I have not spoken in vain . . . Good night, and God bless every one of you."

The applause caught up her last words, so that as she stood there, her hands lifted, her face losing its immobility and beginning to soften, she seemed to be drowning in its thunder. The noise was deafening—a solid cataract of sound breaking over her, in wave after wave of acclaim and worship.

Then, after a moment, raised arms began to appear among the audience, waving cheques and bills. The moving points of white and green sprouted and spread: soon the whole auditorium, from the floor to the highest gallery, was in a solid flutter, like a forest under thickening snow. Beneath the snow were voices clamouring to give.

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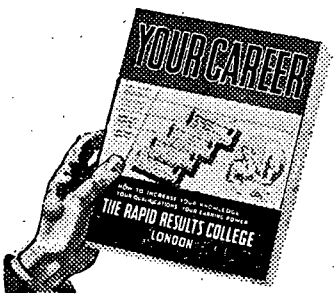
The hands with the cheques and bills seemed to be surging towards Mrs. Bannister, bringing bright hope for the future.

★ ***Persian moonlight turns to silver the desert ruins of Persepolis—the rose gardens of Shiraz. The river roars green. Against this alluring Iran background, Christopher Landon describes Major Conway's exciting adventures on a secret mission. The First Part of "The Skull and the Sword" appears in next month's Argosy on sale February 10.***

★ PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 9. Argosy's ninth Prize Crossword Competition appears on page 144. There will be one-guinea book tokens for the first three correct solutions checked on the closing date. Entries should be completed *in ink*, and posted to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 9), 3 Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp). to arrive by Tuesday, February 9th, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale April 9th.



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PRIZE CROSS WORD

No. 9

★

Rules of Entry on page 143

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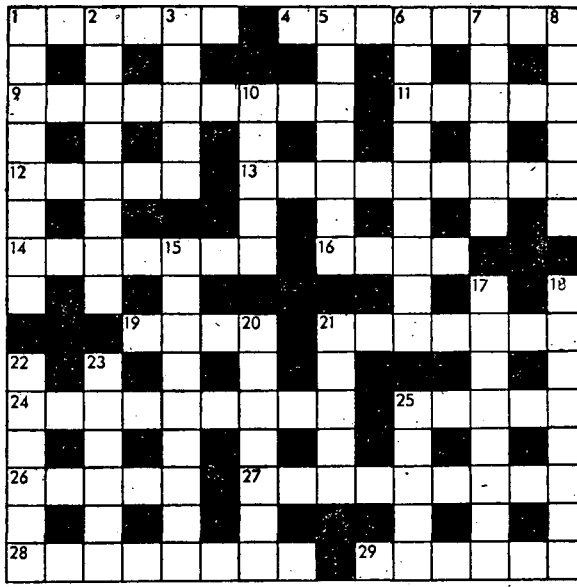

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CUT ALONG THIS LINE

CLUES

Across

1 Often publicly associated with a crown (6).

4 Sovereign beard (8).

9 There's nothing to equal this small type (9).

11 Can that may also be attached to a goat (5).

12 Before Woodley, after Brigham (5).

13 I crate dew for a cooling drink (4, 5).

14 These pointed instruments are all but unnecessary (7).

16 A narrow aperture, but lots goes into it (4).

19 The worst possible way to run (4).

21 Extract information from relatives and you get Cinderella's coach (7).

24 Keats implied that Cortez was (5-4).

25 A frolic? It's certainly saucy (5).

26 The famous soprano sounds good enough to eat (5).

27 This fabric suggests that the Q.C. has been taking precautions against sunburn (5, 4).

28 He left: patiently submissive (8).

29 Darwin's was of species (6).

Down

1 Any gin? No? Naturally, that's irritating (8).

2 Signor Brunoni in *Cranford* was one (8).

3 The ape would have to go east to reach the fruit (5).

5 Fishy heraldic stars (7).

6 It suggests a rather angular apartment (5-4).

7 "Far back, through creeks and —— making" (Clough) (6).

8 Strata of useful hens (6).

10 Even decapitated the demons are noxious (5).

15 Proceeding clumsily to the tree-felling (9).

17 It's a lazy way to read, though it sounds energetic (8).

18 All in one piece, like a horse that hasn't been schooled! (8).

20 It won't unlock anything for you, even if you hit it (7).

21 Put a penny in the carillon and step on it (5).

22 Taken with salt it's hot stuff (6).

23 Set up to an oriental potentate for semi-precious stones (6).

25 This tree can be found in well-spaced arbours (5).

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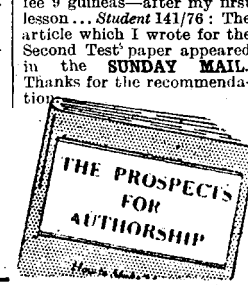

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